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Project Planning and Evaluation Guidebook: A Manual for Practitioners and Managers of Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Projects

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. <u>Introduction</u>

Federal, State, County, and Municipal government agencies, as well as public policy foundations and institutes, make extensive use of evaluation results from pilot and demonstration projects in order to plan, implement, and manage more effective health and social service projects. Evaluation data also are used in the development of new policies necessary to meet changing social and economic needs. The planning, implementation, and assessment of demonstration projects plays a critical role in the development of reliable and valid evaluation results. This volume addresses the requirements associated with the design and evaluation of self-sufficiency demonstration projects from the perspective of project managers.

By way of introduction, this section provides a brief overview of demonstration projects, describes the projects operated by the Demonstration and Special Projects Division in the Office of Community Services, discusses the purpose of this guidebook, and suggests how this guidebook can best be used by community based organizations, particularly community action agencies (CAA) that are designing a demonstration project, or are applying for or have received a demonstration grant.

A. <u>Demonstration Projects</u>

Demonstration projects are a specific form of action research. Demonstration projects are unique in that they offer project managers an opportunity to develop and test innovative treatments for social ills that might not find an audience in a more academic setting. Sources of such innovative treatments vary, and may be conceived by project managers at any level, from entry-level caseworkers to experienced senior project staff. The range and level of research objectives is equally varied. For example, one project may seek to determine specifically how having a safe place to develop resumes and contact potential employers affects homeless men. Another higher-level project may be designed to determine the impact of inter-organizational and cross-jurisdictional collaborations on regional social service delivery systems.

There are two critical elements to demonstration projects that set them aside from other types of grant projects. First, they are applied <u>field tests</u> – whether they are testing innovative new approaches or applying established interventions to new populations. Second, they include strong <u>evaluation</u> components. In sharp contrast to demonstration projects, most operating grants support on-going projects that do not require formal evaluation beyond routine administrative and fiscal monitoring. Demonstration grants are unique in that they combine operational elements with evaluation research requirements.

While there is considerable overlap between the views of project managers and evaluators, there also are critical differences. We would argue that the primary objective of self-sufficiency project managers is to have a ***significant, non-trivial impact*** on their target population. They

want to improve the social and economic quality of life for low-income individuals, families, and communities. The goals of a self-sufficiency project may include, for example, participants getting a job, an education, improved housing, or meeting debts. Other goals could include the creation of new jobs or micro-business opportunities. When these goals are achieved in part or whole, there is a natural tendency to attribute the outcomes to the efforts of the project. The primary objective of evaluators, however, is to make *valid inferences*. They seek to determine whether the observed changes in the lives of the targeted individuals, families, or communities are a consequence of the specific design and implementation of self-sufficiency projects or other unrelated factors. In order to determine whether outcomes can be attributed to a project, evaluators institute complex experimental, quasi-experimental, and statistical designs, including where feasible control and comparison groups. These research designs are frequently viewed by local project managers as a burden on project staff when working with low-income persons and families. One important purpose of this Guidebook will be to demonstrate the usefulness of many of these evaluation tools in project design, implementation, management, and monitoring, as well as to the operational staff in the conduct of their work.

For demonstration grants to yield useful, systematic results that can inform both the sponsoring agency and other projects, the project manager and the evaluator must operate within a common frame of reference. Past experience has taught us that frequently it is critical to the success of a project that project managers and evaluators become partners with a common purpose – to identify replicable social service delivery and community development practices that improve the quality of life of project participants. To support this conviction, the next three chapters of this guide offer suggestions on how to approach two critical tasks (1) selecting an evaluator, and (2) developing an effective project framework.

B. <u>Demonstrations and Special Projects Division, Office of Community Services (OCS)</u>

The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Community Services (OCS), in the Department of Health and Human Services administers a number of demonstration grant projects. Past and present demonstration grant projects include:

$ The Demonstration Partnership Project (DPP).

$ The Family Support Center (FSC) Homeless Prevention Project.

$ The Residential Energy Assistance Challenge Option (REACH) Project.

$ The Assets for Independence Act (AFIA) Project.

The Demonstration Partnership Project, under Section 408 of the Human Services Reauthorization Act of 1986, as amended, authorizes a demonstration project to operate in conjunction with the Community Services Block Grant project. The unique purpose of the DPP is to develop and implement innovative approaches for dealing with common critical needs of

the poor common at the community level. Each of the DPP projects focuses on developing new ways to promote individual and family self-sufficiency. The objectives of the project are to:

$ Stimulate eligible entities (mainly Community Action Agencies) to develop new approaches that enable greater self-sufficiency among the poor.

$ Test and evaluate these new approaches.

$ Disseminate project results and evaluation findings so that these new approaches can be replicated.

$ Strengthen the ability of eligible entities to integrate, coordinate, and redirect activities that promote maximum self-sufficiency among the poor.

The DPP represents the first appearance of a formal research and development component in the Community Services Block Grant. Federal guidelines require that the projects include a strong third-party evaluation component. Thus, a scientifically valid determination of what works and is worthy of replication and what does not work is essential.

Demonstration Partnership grants are made for projects that:

$ Are innovative and can be coordinated with the grantee's ongoing projects.

$ Involve significant new combinations of resources including partnerships with other community agencies.

$ Are potentially replicable.

$ Are evaluated by a third party and the results are disseminated to appropriate entities.

C.   The Purpose of the Guide

Two of the stated purposes of many of the demonstration projects managed by OCS are to *test* and *evaluate* new approaches to provide for greater self-sufficiency of the poor, and to disseminate project results and *evaluation findings* so that new approaches can be replicated. In order for a grantee to meet these requirements, its staff must:

$ Carefully describe the project.

$ Continually document the process of project development.

$ Collect data on both project participants and non-participant control group members.

$ Analyze the data.

$ Draw conclusions from the analyses.

$ Prepare full and summary reports of findings.

The purpose of this guide is to assist demonstration grant applicants and grantees to design and implement self-sufficiency projects, as well as to understand the role of the evaluation component in the process of obtaining and implementing a demonstration grant, in selecting and working with a third-party evaluator, and in preparing required annual and evaluation reports. Although the authors of this *Guidebook* are evaluators, we do not take an exclusive evaluation point of view, but rather see good projects and evaluation resulting from careful, *joint planning*.

D.   How to Use This Guide

The guidebook is organized into the following additional eight sections. They are structured to assist the user throughout the grant process, from designing the project, to applying for a grant, to preparing the final project and evaluation report.

Section II, Selecting An Evaluator, focuses on the qualifications project managers should look for when selecting their third-party evaluator, federal requirements for a competitive process when selecting an evaluator, and how to work with the evaluator once he or she has been selected. This section may be applicable during the grant application process or immediately after award of the grant. It is important to have the third-party evaluator on board as soon as possible.

Section III, Developing a Project Framework, will be useful to grant applicants as it focuses on procedures for developing clear definitions of the project target population, goals and objectives, interventions and the necessary activities to reach those goals, and self-sufficiency. It describes the process for developing hypotheses. Not only does framework relate directly to the review criteria used to assess the grant application, it forms the underpinnings of the project design, and ties the project into the evaluation process.

Section IV, Using a Logic Model to Design, Manage, and Evaluate Your Project, describes logic models and how to construct them. When properly constructed, logic models provide project managers with a visual realization of their project that can be used to plan, implement, manage, monitor, and evaluate the project. They also provide a convenient summary of the project and can assist project evaluators in formulating a design for assessing project effectiveness and efficiency. Finally, logic models assist project managers and evaluators to develop a common understanding of the project.

Section V, Finalizing Your Evaluation Plan, describes the process of developing the evaluation plan. Beginning with the initial evaluation plan, it describes the role of the technical assistance contractor and the steps involved in finalizing the plan. New grantees will find this section useful because it clarifies expectations and details about what will be required of project staff and third-party evaluators during the first few months of the grant.

Section VI, The Evaluation Process, describes the evaluation process and the relationship between the project design, project implementation, and evaluation. It describes the roles and responsibilities of the grantee and the third-party evaluator regarding process and outcome data collection and analyses. This section is useful at the beginning of the grant, as well as throughout the project implementation period.

Section VII, The Interim Evaluation Report and Analysis, focuses upon the operational period of the project when services are provided and data are collected on a regular basis. It deals with interim feedback to the project from the evaluator, identifying and resolving data collection problems, and making adjustments to the project based on this feedback.

Section VIII, Final Reporting Requirements, describes agency expectations regarding both the final report of findings and the summary report of findings, as well as the requirement to make a presentation at an outcome workshop at the end of the grant. This section is not only important at the end of the grant period, it should be read initially to give the grantee an idea of the sort of final documentation that their evaluation plan will be working toward. Further, grantees hoping to get a continuation grant must be able to document their success in terms of their evaluation findings and to justify their request for continued funding.

E.   Themes, Themes, and Themes

Throughout the Guidebook, we emphasize a number of issues, approaches, and concepts that we judge to be critical to the design, development, and implementation of strong demonstration projects. The two most important themes are: (1) the role of the evaluator as a project partner, and (2) the necessity for hard planning. Because of the special nature of demonstration projects as laboratories for testing out new forms of social service delivery interventions and techniques, and the consequent importance of evaluation and project assessment, it is crucial that the management team develop an early relationship or partnership with an evaluator or evaluation team. We strongly recommend that the core planning team create a relationship with an evaluator prior to initiating the writing of the grant proposal. Qualified evaluators are helpful in the design of a project, as well as in their assessment.

It has been observed that to fail to plan is to plan to fail. This truism is an iron law when it comes to demonstration projects. It is a touchstone to which we will repeatedly return throughout the text of the guidebook. It also is why we emphasis, again and again, the need to develop a strong relationship with an evaluator. It has been our experience that in most cases

projects that cannot be evaluated have been poorly conceived. If a project has been well designed, it should have a clarity, simplicity, and elegance about it which will make a reviewer or observer say, "I got it!"

II.   Selecting and Working with Your Evaluator

Selecting a project evaluator is an important management task. A good evaluator can enhance a project in many ways. For example, an evaluator can:

$ Help design and plan the project to achieve its intended goals.

$ Help monitor the implementation of the project.

$ Provide timely information that can be used to refine the project and help keep it on track.

$ Accurately document a project's experiences and successes.

$ Help market the project to constituents and funding agencies.

This chapter provides some helpful information about how to select and work with an evaluator. A checklist of ten indicators of a good evaluator has been developed for use in the selection process. Common types of evaluators are identified along with some pros and cons of working with each. This section also offers suggestions on how to procure an evaluator through a competitive process. Finally, the roles of the evaluator and project manager are distinguished to help clarify how to work with an evaluator.

A.   Selecting an Evaluator

There is no fool-proof method for selecting an evaluator who will be a good match for a specific project. However, there are some simple indicators for identifying good candidates. In addition, there are some helpful questions that can be asked of prospective evaluators.

Indicators of a Good Evaluator

Communicates in clear, understandable terms. Good evaluators will *not* speak in esoteric terms; they will use language project staff can understand. If a prospective evaluator uses unfamiliar terms, ask for an explanation. A person who cannot explain in layman's terms how to design and conduct your project evaluation is probably not a good candidate. If an evaluator is hard to understand during an initial interview, he isn't likely to be more coherent during the project when you need to be able to discuss details of your evaluation with others.

Makes an effort to understand the project. An experienced evaluator will make every effort to understand what the project is trying to accomplish. A good candidate should take time to ask questions about the project, listen carefully, and learn about the project before he or she begins to suggest evaluation approaches. He or she is likely to ask for time with key staff to discuss their

understanding of the overall project framework, objectives, and goals. A good evaluator will listen to project staff to gain a better understanding of the project and develop a suitable evaluation design.

Ten Indicators of a Good Evaluator

CHECKLIST

µ   Communicates in terms that you understand

µ   Makes an effort to understand your project

µ   Has experience evaluating similar projects

µ   Knows the target population and community

µ   Has developed data collection forms

µ   Has experience in using statistical methods

µ   Is not too close to your project

µ   Is willing to test only your project
           hypotheses

µ   Is willing to develop a flexible evaluation
           design

µ   Is willing to spend time at your project

Has experience evaluating similar projects. A good candidate will have evaluated projects that provided services similar to those that the project offers. Such experience will help the evaluator quickly gain an understanding of the project and recommend an appropriate evaluation design. It is not necessary for the evaluator's experience to match the project perfectly, but the evaluation experience should be relevant to your project's core services.

Knows the target population and community. A good candidate will be knowledgeable about your project's target population and community. This experience is important because the

evaluation design must take into account important characteristics of the target population, the social and cultural environment in which the project is embedded, and other existing projects that serve the same population. Moreover, the evaluation methods must be culturally appropriate and sensitive to issues within the community. In some cases, it is important for the evaluator to be of the same race or ethnicity as the target population. Such similarity may help reduce barriers, especially if the evaluation will involve participant interviews by the evaluator.

Has developed data collection forms. Experience developing data collection forms is very important. Without good data collection forms, the chances of obtaining useful information about the project will diminish. Good candidates will be able to provide examples of data collection forms they developed to evaluate other projects. In particular, evaluators should be able to explain the meaning of the terms validity and reliability, how these terms interrelate, how they can be assessed, and their importance in evaluating data collection forms.

Has experience in using statistical methods. A good evaluator must be able to use appropriate statistical methods to determine the effectiveness of the project. Someone who is inexperienced in statistics may use methods that are not sensitive to changes produced by the project, or may use methods that suggest changes took place that did not. If the evaluator you select cannot perform statistical analyses, it will be important that he or she receive assistance from an experienced statistician.

Is not too close to your project. A good evaluator needs to be objective and able to provide constructive feedback to you, your staff, and your agency. Too close a relationship with your project may prevent the evaluator from interpreting the data objectively and limit the ability to present certain findings. In addition, findings from an independent evaluator are more likely to be accepted by project critics and funding organizations than findings from someone who is a member of your agency staff.

Is willing to test only your project hypotheses. A good evaluator will not try to test his or her pet hypotheses. The *only* hypotheses that should be tested by the evaluation are those related to the goals of the project. This point is particularly important. Your project's evaluation resources are too limited to support someone else's research interests. In addition, if the evaluator tests for outcomes that are neither predicted nor expected by the project design, the project could be deemed unsuccessful without proper foundation.

Is willing to develop a flexible evaluation design. Project evaluation designs should not be too rigid. Most social projects change as they become implemented and the evaluation design needs to change with the project. The evaluation should not control the project's implementation. Rather, the project's implementation should drive the evaluation design and activities.

Is willing to spend time with your project. A good project evaluator does not show up at the beginning of the project and then disappear until the project is over. It is important for the evaluator to spend time with your staff in order to understand how the project is implemented

and to observe changes in the project over time. The evaluator will not be able to make necessary adjustments in the evaluation design if he or she does not spend time with the project.

<u>Questions to Ask</u>

The following questions will be helpful when interviewing prospective evaluators. How these questions are answered will help you complete the checklist above.

$ **Do you consider yourself an evaluator, a researcher, or statistician?**

Although all three professions use many of the same techniques and skills, there are important differences in the way they go about their work. Evaluators are project-focused and will use research and statistical methods to answer questions about the project. The information an evaluator collects and analyzes is likely to be useful for project management. Researchers are likely to focus on theoretical issues of interest to them and use your project to help test hypotheses with which they are concerned. They may or may not provide you with a good project evaluation. Statisticians are trained to manipulate data. Their focus is likely to be on data characteristics, not on the usefulness of data for understanding your project. A good candidate for your evaluation should clearly think of himself or herself as an evaluator.

$ **What is the difference between evaluation and scientific or basic research?**

Evaluation research is action-oriented and pragmatic. Evaluation research aims at collecting and using information to answer questions about a project. It is a way of generating more information about the project than was available before and assessing the impact of the project on participants. It asks and answers the questions, "What happened?" and "What difference did it make?" Scientific or basic research aims at explaining or predicting events and incorporating findings into a formal body of theory. The difference between the two approaches is exemplified in the economist's interest in explaining the origins of savings behavior in low-income populations and a project manager's interest in designing a project that assists low-income individuals to develop a savings plan and successfully carrying it out. Similarly, a social scientist may be interested in the factors that explain why an individual does or does not focus on reducing their energy costs, while a project planner will focus more on designing a curriculum to teach individuals how to save on energy costs. Well-grounded theory informs the design process and basic research generates theory; evaluation research assesses whether theory, however arrived at, generates practical and effective project designs or policy interventions. A person who does not understand the difference between evaluation and basic research is probably not a good candidate for your project.

$ **What is the difference between process evaluation and outcome evaluation?**

Both types of evaluation are important for your project. Process evaluation will document how the project is implemented, an will look at, for example, issues such as who gets what services, how much they receive, the factors that contribute to the project's success, the barriers encountered, the resources necessary for and used by project operations, and how project partnerships and linkages function. In other words, process evaluations measure project inputs, activities, and outputs. If cost parameters are well defined and more than one project delivery model is being used, it is possible to assess relative cost efficiency of the different service delivery models. Generally speaking, process evaluations do not measure or assess impacts. Impact assessments are the province of outcome evaluations. Outcome evaluations measure how effective a project is in achieving its intended goals. For example, how much does a person who participates in a savings project save in comparison to those who do not? Or, by how much does an individual reduce their energy costs after going through an energy cost reduction training course as compared to those who have not? A person who cannot tell you the difference between these two types of evaluations is not a good candidate.

$ **What is your motivation for evaluating our project?**

The person should indicate a professional interest in conducting project evaluations; in other words they should be making their living or a significant portion of their income by conducting evaluations. Be careful with candidates who come to your project with hypotheses of personal interest they want to add to the evaluation design that have little or nothing to do with your project. Likewise, individuals who plan to evaluate your project as part of a thesis or dissertation are not good candidates. These individuals are obligated to follow the directions of a university committee, which may impose research requirements that are not appropriate for your project.

$ **Have you ever developed data collection forms for a local project evaluation?**

Experienced evaluators will have developed such forms for other project evaluations they have conducted. Ask to see forms they have developed. Do the forms look as if they would be easy to fill out? Are they neat? Do the forms seem to make sense to you? Are they free of typing, grammar, and spelling errors?

$ **Are you willing to make adjustments in the evaluation design after the project is fully underway?**

Most social projects are not implemented exactly as planned. Although an evaluation plan should be developed at the same time the project is being planned, or as soon thereafter as possible the evaluation plan should be flexible. A good evaluator will understand the need to modify the evaluation plan after the project is fully underway. Be

careful of evaluators who insist that a good evaluation plan should not change. Good research designs usually do not change, but good evaluation plans must be flexible.

$ **How much experience do you have using statistical methods?**

A good project evaluator will appreciate both qualitative and quantitative data. It is, however, important that the evaluator is comfortable with quantitative data and has knowledge of a wide range of statistical methods. In addition to having experience with statistics, a good evaluator will be able to explain statistical concepts so you can understand them. It is not necessary for a project evaluator to also be a statistician. More important are the person's resources for getting help with statistical issues that may develop. Does the person indicate where he or she would turn to get help from a statistician?

$ **Who will write the evaluation reports?**

Your evaluator should be the person who writes the project's evaluation reports. Be careful of evaluators who plan to assign the writing to a colleague or student with whom they work. Ask for samples of the evaluator's report writing. Do not accept copies of journal articles. These are not good writing examples because journal articles are often written by more than one person. In addition, they are professionally edited. Ask to see copies of other evaluation reports the evaluator has written. Are the writing samples clearly written? Can you understand what is written? Is the grammar and spelling correct? Are the documents presentable?

$ **Are you willing to produce periodic reports on your findings?**

Periodic reports on evaluation findings are often very helpful and necessary to project management because they provide feedback about how well the project is doing. These reports are not difficult to produce. Good evaluators will be willing to glean their findings and report them to you on a quarterly or semi-annual basis.

B. Types of Evaluators

Evaluators can be classified in different ways. For the purposes of this discussion, we make a general distinction between *internal* and *external* evaluators. This distinction focuses on the evaluator's relationship to your organization. Working with each type of evaluator has certain advantages and disadvantages. Keep in mind that your funding source, such as OCS, may require you to select an external or third-party evaluator.

Internal Evaluators

An internal evaluator is an employee of your agency or organization. He or she can serve as an evaluator under different auspices within the organization. Internal evaluators are sometimes part of a research and evaluation unit, or they may be project staff who function in an evaluation capacity.

Research and evaluation unit staff. Many large social service agencies have a research and evaluation unit that employs professional staff who conduct project evaluations needed by the organization. These evaluators have the advantage of knowing the service projects administered by the organization and the staff who deliver those projects. Many times these evaluators were members of the grant proposal team and already have a good understanding of the proposed project. Because they are already part of the organization, there is no need to search for and contract with an outside evaluator. As agency staff, they are often housed in close proximity to the project, which can make them highly accessible to the project manager and staff. Although these are some obvious advantages for using this type of evaluator, there are some disadvantages. Because there is no contract for evaluation services, a project manger may not have much leverage to ensure that evaluation tasks are performed satisfactorily and on time. The evaluation staff are responsible to their office and not to the project manager. In addition, the objectivity of an evaluation conducted by employees of the same agency is sometimes questioned. Evaluation unit staff may not always be perceived as having sufficient independence to be critical of projects administered by the parent organization.

Project staff. Many project managers received some research and evaluation training as part of their undergraduate or graduate education. In addition, some project managers and staff have worked with professional evaluators who trained or "empowered" them to conduct on-going project assessments. These evaluation experiences and activities help prepare project managers and staff to conduct internal evaluations. An evaluation conducted by project staff is usually inexpensive and focuses on those aspects of the project where staff consider evaluation findings will be most useful. An on-going project assessment allows project staff to respond quickly to implementation problems and to continuously improve project services. While there are benefits to using project staff as evaluators, there are some inherent drawbacks to this approach. Project staff are usually too close to the project to be objective. Their project advocate role is likely to take precedence over their evaluator role, which can limit their ability to critically assess project operations and outcomes. Furthermore, evaluation tasks compete for time with their project responsibilities. Project staff can be expected to give higher priority to working with participants than to collecting and analyzing evaluation data. Because the objectivity of these types of evaluations may be questioned, findings from evaluations conducted by project staff may not be given much weight by outside reviewers and funding agencies.

External Evaluators

A good project evaluation will be objective and fair. It is for this reason that one of the indicators of a good evaluator listed above is that the evaluator not be too close to your project.

Some funding agencies require a grantee to contract with an external third party evaluator to help ensure that the evaluation assess the funded project critically and objectively. For example, the OCS Demonstration Partnership Project, Family Support Center, and REACH grant projects managed by OCS required third party evaluations. The Assets for Independence Act grantees (AFIA) are not required to hire a third party evaluator, but must cooperate with a national evaluation contractor. There are several common types of external evaluators, including independent consultants, university research centers, non-profit research organizations, and evaluation research firms.

Independent consultants. Many professional evaluators are self-employed and independently contract with organizations to conduct project evaluations. Also, some university faculty members do some independent consulting. These individuals may or may not limit their work to project evaluations. Most self-employed independent consultants work on more than one project at a time in order to maintain a sufficient income. Independent evaluation consultants can be very professional and efficient in their work. There is little incentive for them to waste time or do work that will not be acceptable to their participants (project managers and staff). Because they often rely on "word-of-mouth" references for future work, these evaluators are usually concerned with their reputation for good work. However, when considering contracting with an independent consultant, you should check their references for past performance. Independent consultants often have a great deal of flexibility in their schedules and can be responsive to short-term requests for evaluation work. These evaluators are often less expensive when compared to other types of external evaluators because they may not charge an overhead fee in addition to their professional fee. One distinct disadvantage to using an independent consultant is that they usually do not have backup resources to do their work in cases of emergency.

University-based research centers. Many state universities, especially the land grant schools, have research centers that contract to do evaluation work. A research center can be part of a school within the university (e.g., school of social work), within a department (e.g., urban studies), or an independent center of the university. Evaluators within these centers can be faculty members with teaching responsibilities or full-time research staff. These evaluators are often highly trained and skilled individuals who have access to a network of other professional staff at the university. Like independent consultants, these evaluators are likely to work on more than one study at a time. The very environment in which they work encourages these evaluators to be theoretically oriented. When contracting with this type of evaluator, it is important to make sure that the evaluation is not driven by the evaluator's research interests and need to publish. Cost is another issue to address. Universities often add high overhead fees to contracts. Ask about the university's rate structure for contracts when you begin to consider this type of evaluator so that you have this information up front.

Non-profit research organizations. In many parts of the country there are non-profit research organizations that conduct good project evaluations. These organizations often focus their work on a specific service sector (e.g., education, welfare projects, health care), and some organizations have a mission statement that limits their research activities to certain areas. Consequently, the professional staffs in these organizations are often experts in their field.

However, not all non-profit research organizations have project evaluation expertise. The research conducted by these organizations may be limited to policy studies, surveys, or curriculum development. If you consider a non-profit research organization as a potential external evaluator, make sure that it has project evaluation experience. Like university research centers, non-profit organizations can have high overhead rates. It is important to ask at the outset about the organization's rate structure for contracts such as yours.

Evaluation research firms. During the past couple of decades, many companies have emerged that specialize in evaluation research. These firms range in size from small businesses to very large corporations with offices in multiple locations. Evaluators in these firms tend to represent diverse educational backgrounds and have a broad range of evaluation experiences and skills. These evaluators are often highly pragmatic in their approach and have a strong incentive to do good work for participants so that they can use participants as references for future work. Usually a team of staff is assigned to each evaluation, including at least one senior evaluator and several research assistants. This arrangement allows for lower skilled staff to do less demanding work, lower skilled staff. In addition to the team assigned to your evaluation, there are often sufficient professional resources within the firm to backup and supplement the skills of your evaluation team. Members of the team may be assigned to multiple evaluations at the same time to ensure that each person is highly billable. Therefore, the work on your evaluation may compete for work on other contracts. As with university research and non-profit research organizations, evaluation research firms can be expensive because of their rate structures. These firms include overhead and profit fees in their costs. Ask about these fees when you begin to discussions with an evaluation research firm. Keep in mind that some evaluation research firms are willing to lower their profit fee in order to secure a contract.

It is possible to mix and match different types of evaluators depending upon your resources. Some evaluation tasks can be performed by one type of evaluator (e.g., independent consultant) and others by another type of evaluator (e.g., university research center). Mixing and matching evaluators, however, places an additional burden on the project manager to oversee multiple evaluation contractors and orchestrate the activities of each so that everything fits together into a complete project evaluation.

C.   Procuring an Evaluator Through a Competitive Process

Frequently federal and other funding agencies require that grant recipients procure evaluation services through open and free competition. If the services of your third-party evaluator are to be obtained in a competitive manner, the following suggestion can help you foster maximum competition:

Ÿ   Provide clear and accurate descriptions of the technical requirements for the materials, services, and products to be delivered by the evaluator.

Ÿ   Avoid restrictive specifications or evaluation criteria that could limit unfair competition.

Ÿ   Solicit offers from as many responsible and qualified sources as possible.

Ÿ   Advertise the contract opportunity as widely as feasible and allow adequate time for presentation of offers.

Ÿ   Perform price and cost analysis on offers received to determine reasonableness, allowability, and allocation of proposed costs.

A contract for a third-party evaluator can usually be competitively bid before or after the receipt of a grant award. Keep in mind that if you decide to conduct a competition prior to submitting a grant application, or prior to the period in which allowable grant costs can be incurred, the cost of the competition usually is *not* chargeable to a grant, should one be awarded. When preparing a grant application, you should check with the funding source to see if these pre-project costs can be covered by the grant if awarded.

D.   <u>Working With Your Evaluator</u>

A successful working relationship with your evaluator is important for both your project and the evaluation. Such a relationship will not only allow the evaluator to better understand your project, it will also guide him or her in providing you with more helpful information about your project. Furthermore, a good project-evaluator relationship can strengthen the capabilities of you and your staff to think in terms of "on-going self-assessment" and "continuous improvement." Good working relationships are fostered by a clear understanding of roles.

<u>The Evaluator's Role</u>

Although the evaluator is usually not someone who is a member of your project staff, he or she should be considered an important member of your project team. As a team member, the evaluator should be actively involved with the project. A good evaluator can be expected to:

Help design the evaluation. The evaluator has a major responsibility in the design of the evaluation. However, this activity should not be left entirely to the evaluator. Project management and staff need to be actively involved in developing the evaluation plan. The evaluator should offer optional approaches to the evaluation and explain the strengths and limitations of each approach. In the end, evaluation design decisions should be mutual actions on the part of project management and the evaluator. Bear in mind that, as your project reaches full implementation, it often becomes necessary to revise the evaluation plan to reflect modifications and ensure that the evaluation assesses the actual project as it evolves.

Attend project meetings. One of the best ways for the evaluator to get to understand your project is to periodically attend staff and other project meetings. This involvement will allow the evaluator to stay current with changes in the project. The interaction will also encourage communication on evaluation activities, such as data collection, and give the evaluator the opportunity to provide your staff with feedback on his or her observations.

Design the data collection forms. In collaboration with you and your staff, the evaluator is responsible for the design and development of the data collection forms. The forms must collect appropriate and sufficient data for the evaluation, but they also need to be user-friendly for your staff. Whenever possible, these forms should be designed to assist staff as they conduct their work.

Train project staff to use data collection forms. Project staff who will collect data must be trained to administer each data collection form. Serious data collection problems will develop without adequate staff training. The evaluator should conduct this training to make sure that your staff clearly understands how to use and record data on every form. It may be necessary to retrain staff on how to use data collection forms, especially when forms are used only periodically or if the evaluator identifies problems with data quality. Retraining is particularly important when key staff turn over.

Help design the data collection plan. Your evaluator should work with you to help develop a clear data collection plan that your staff will be able to follow. This plan must ensure that complete and accurate evaluation data will be collected and turned over to the evaluator.

Observe the project. An evaluator needs to see the project in action. Direct observation not only helps the evaluator to better understand the project, it can be an important data collection method. Such observation is often part of the process of evaluation, which requires a good project description. Also, structured observations may be used by the evaluator as a method for collecting some types of outcome data.

Manage and/or conduct data collection activities. The responsibility for data collection can be negotiated. Data can be collected by the evaluator, project staff, or by both the evaluator and project staff. Project managers sometimes elect to limit the cost of the evaluation contract by having their staff collect most or all of the data. If you and your project staff take on data collection responsibilities, the evaluator should be given some responsibility for management oversight of data collection. Such oversight should include training staff on data collection procedures, periodic monitoring of the data collection activities, performing quality control checks to make sure that the data are of sufficient quality, and retraining staff when data collection problems emerge.

Manage the database. Regardless of who collects the evaluation data, the evaluator should be responsible for managing the evaluation database. This responsibility includes performing data entry tasks, data cleaning, maintaining data backup and security procedures, and preparing data files for statistical analyses.

Analyze the data. A data analysis plan should be part of the evaluation design. The evaluator is responsible for analyzing the data according to this agreed-upon plan. The evaluator's statistical skills are applied during this task. It is the evaluator's obligation to seek and obtain help from a statistician if he or she does not have the necessary skills to appropriately analyze the data.

Write the evaluation reports. Although the evaluator is the person who will write the evaluation reports, this activity should not occur in a vacuum. The evaluator should negotiate the outline of each report with you. Some evaluation reports are written after the full evaluation is completed. However, a good evaluator will be willing to provide you with interim reports that can give you feedback on your project. These interim reports usually focus on process findings that will help you gain an understanding of how well the project is being implemented. With sufficient time, these reports can also include preliminary outcome findings that will indicate the effectiveness of the project. Federally funded projects are often required to submit one or more interim evaluation reports, a final evaluation report, and a summary evaluation report. Your contact with the evaluator should specify the number and due dates of all evaluation reports as deliverable products.

Conduct evaluation briefings. The evaluator can help you prepare and conduct briefings on project evaluation findings. Such briefings are often conducted for advisory boards, staff meetings, constituent meetings, and funding organizations. Some funding organizations require grantees to present their evaluation findings at "reporting out" conferences. Project managers should anticipate the need for evaluation briefings and include them in the evaluation contract. Usually the project manager and project evaluator will participate at the OCS reporting out conference.

The Project Manager's Role

Project managers have important responsibilities related to their project's evaluation. The project manager is usually the point of contact for the evaluator and must assist the evaluator in a number of ways.

Write and manage the evaluation contract. The evaluation contract needs to specify those evaluation tasks to be conducted by the evaluator and those tasks that will be conducted by project staff. All required evaluation deliverables and dates of delivery must be listed in the contract. When writing the evaluation contract, it is often helpful to talk with the evaluator about each task and deliverable so that both of you clearly understand what the contract will cover. Ultimately, it is the manager's responsibility to ensure that the evaluation activities are carried out according to the contract. If the evaluator cannot meet the terms of the contract, the project manager must take appropriate actions.

Help design the evaluation. Without the active involvement of the project manager in the development of the evaluation design, there is a good chance the evaluation will not meet the needs of the project. It is often helpful to include other key project staff in the development of, or revisions to, the evaluation design.

Help design the data collection plan. Regardless of who is responsible for specific data collection activities, the project manager should work with the evaluator to design the data collection plan. As project manager, you need to make sure that the data collection schedule and activities are feasible and compatible with service delivery and staff responsibilities. A data collection plan that places too much burden on project staff and participants will not work.

Ensure cooperation of project staff. The evaluation cannot be successful without the cooperation of project staff. The project manager is responsible for helping project staff understand the importance of the evaluation and ensuring that each staff member cooperates with the evaluator.

Monitor and supervise data collection activities. It is not uncommon for project staff to collect process and outcome evaluation data. If your staff have data collection responsibilities, it is very important for you to have a clear data collection plan in which staff responsibilities and data collection procedures are specified. As project manager you are responsible for the chain of data collection activities carried out by your staff, as well as the quality and completeness of the data they collect.

Provide feedback on evaluation activities. Your feedback to the evaluator is extremely important. Also, the project manager should make sure that the project staff provides the evaluator feedback on evaluation issues, especially the design and use of all data collection forms. The evaluator needs to know if you and your staff understand the evaluation design and data collection plan, if the data collection forms are working, if your staff is experiencing any problems collecting evaluation data, and any other issues related to the evaluation. The more feedback you provide the evaluator, the more useful the evaluation will be for project management.

Review and critique evaluation reports. The project manger is responsible for reading and commenting on all evaluation reports. The evaluator needs to hear from you about the types of evaluation information that you find helpful and how you will use the evaluation findings. Constructive criticism will help your evaluator prepare meaningful and readable evaluation reports.

In summary, project managers are faced with important decisions when selecting a evaluator. There are many different types of project evaluators who work in a wide range of settings. Moreover, the skills and experiences of project evaluators vary considerably. To help project managers select an appropriate evaluator, this section has listed indicators of a good evaluator along with questions that can be asked of prospective evaluators. These indicators and questions should be used with discretion, and emphasis should be placed on those areas that are most

relevant to your evaluation needs. To help you make decisions when selecting an evaluator, this section also notes the advantages and disadvantages of working with common types of evaluators. Once you have selected a project evaluator, you must build your relationship with the evaluator. To help you build a good working relationship, this section has discussed typical roles of both the evaluator and the project manager, with emphasis placed on the evaluation responsibility of each.

III.   Developing a Project Framework

Your project framework is a clear and detailed description of the activities that your project will carry out, the characteristics of the target population, and the expected changes that project participants will experience as a result of those activities. This section addresses the major steps in developing a project framework, including conducting a needs assessment, defining the target population, establishing project goals and objectives, and describing project interventions or activities. It then describes the link between the project framework and the evaluation plan, and a discussion of how to develop a project hypothesis.

A.   Conducting a Needs Assessment

An important *first* step in developing a project framework is to assess why the community needs the new project. Conducting a needs assessment is sometimes overlooked by project planners, and this oversight can have serious negative consequences for the project and its staff during implementation. A needs assessment documents the necessity for the project by identifying existing problems within a   community, the services available to community members, and their unmet needs. Projects designed around presumptions about existing problems generally have limited impact because they may be designed for a problem that does not really exist, offer services that are already available, or offer services that do not match the needs of the target population.

In addition to documenting the need for the project, a good needs assessment will collect information that can serve as "baseline" data in the project evaluation. For example, a good needs assessment will include information on the type and extent of the problems within the target population before the project begins. The project evaluation can compare the needs assessment information with information collected after the project is fully underway. If the identified problems diminish within the target population by the end of the project, then there is some evidence that the project has been effective.

A needs assessment encompasses three components:

$	Assessing the problems or needs faced by the target population.

$	Assessing the existing community resources available to address the identified problems or needs of the target population.

$	Assessing the gaps between the problems and existing resources.

Assessing the Parent Agency

Before documenting the problems and needs of the target population, it is critical to look at your agency and assess the *compatibility or scope* of the proposed project with the agency. If there is little or no compatibility between the new project and your agency, it will be difficult to plan and implement a successful project. Often this assessment is done almost subconsciously by agency administrators and project planners when considering a potential project. You intuitively focus on the needs within your service population that your agency can effectively address. Problems and service needs that are far removed from your agency's current services tend to be left alone. However, there are times when a perceived unmet need falls within a new service domain for your agency. The following questions can be asked of agency administrators and staff to help assess the compatibility of the new project with the agency:

$ Does the new project fit within the agency's mission?

$ Does the agency currently serve the new project's target population?

$ Where within the agency's organizational structure does the new project best fit?

$ Which services currently provided by the agency could be part of the new project?

$ What new services would the agency have to provide?

Answers to these questions should lead to a conclusion as to whether it is worthwhile to continue with the needs assessment. It may be that the answers suggest that it would be better for a different agency to develop and implement the new project. In that case, you might want to market the project concept to another service provider and help them conduct a full needs assessment.

Assessing Problems Faced by the Target Population

Although you may already have a good sense of the problems faced by the target population, it is very important to document these problems with reliable information. You will need this information for your own decision-making, and any subsequent proposal should include documenting data and the sources of the data. There are two general types of information needed to assess the problems within the target population: information on the *types* of existing problems, and information on the *extent* of each problem. Exhibit III-1 gives several techniques that can be used to identify and document the types and extent of problems faced by the target population.

Regardless of which of the techniques are used to assess problems within the target population, you should end up with a list of common problems and a judgment about the extent (e.g., level of need, the number of people affected) of each problem. For example, perhaps you and others within your agency have become aware of what appears to be a growing number of families

within the community who have lost Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits due to sanctions. Reliable information from the community has identified ten associated problems faced by these former welfare families, and the extent of each problem (see Exhibit III-2).

This list of problems can then be used in the next assessment component, assessing existing community resources. Before we talk about that component, we need to point out that when documenting both the types and extent of problems faced by a target population, it is helpful to collect information on the characteristics of those individuals within the target population who face certain problems. Common demographic characteristics can be used here, such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and family composition. This specification tells who within the population is most at risk of certain problems and helps to establish the need for service. For example, you may discover from a key informant survey that approximately equal numbers of men and women seem to lack job skills, but that individuals under the age of 30 face this problem more than older persons. This information will be helpful if your agency decides to design a job skills training project.

Exhibit III-1
Techniques for Assessing Target Population Problems

Assessment Technique	Identify Type of Problem	Identify Extent of Problem
Case Studies: collect information from a few persons or families receiving services from your agency who exemplify individuals in the target population	μ	
Community Forums/Hearings: hold public meetings with individuals from the general population and key informants to discuss problems and issues	μ	μ
Key Informant Survey: use interviews or questionnaires with individuals who represent and speak for constituencies in the target community (community organizers, clergy, tenant association members, elected officials, etc.)	μ	μ
Focus Groups: ask questions of small groups of individuals who represent the target population	μ	μ
Social Indicators: use most recent census data, local public records and reports (e.g., unemployment, welfare, housing, health, crime, drug abuse, etc.)		μ

Assessing Existing Community Resources

This component of the needs assessment identifies the services and resources currently available to the target population. *Available* is a key word here. Some services may be present within the

larger community but not available to the target population due to location, eligibility criteria, or other barriers that prevent or discourage the use of those services. Sources of information for assessing existing community resources include, but are not limited to:

$ Service provider directories

$ Service provider surveys

$ Community planning board documents

$ Key informant interviews

A useful technique to help assess community resources is to construct a "Community Services Matrix" like that shown in Exhibit III-3. Each service provider within the community is listed along with the services they provide. The services listed in the matrix should be related to the identified problems within the target population (for this example, the services match the problems listed in Exhibit III-2).

Exhibit III-2
Problems Faced by Families Who Have Lost TANF Benefits

Problem	Extent of Problem		
	High	Moderate	Low
Unemployment	!		
Lack Skills for Good Paying Jobs	!		
Lack of Child Care	!		
Lack of Transportation for Work/Training		!	
Housing Evictions			!
Lack of Money for Food and Clothing		!	
Drug/Alcohol Abuse		!	
Lack of Medical Care Access		!	
High School Dropouts/Lack GED	!		
Family Crises/Divorce/Separations			!

Assessing Unmet Needs

The *gap* between the problems and existing resources defines the unmet needs of the target population. It is these unmet needs that the project should address. A quick glance at the Community Service Matrix shows the gaps in services for former TANF beneficiaries.   Job skill training has been identified as a high level need, but only two providers in the community offer this type of training. Childcare services and a GED project are two other highly needed services, but there is only one provider of each service. There are no transportation service providers, and only two providers of health care services. However, there seems to be a sufficient number of agencies who offer emergency housing, distribute emergency clothing and food, provide drug treatment services, and offer family counseling.

A new project designed to help families who have lost their TANF benefits should include or arrange for those services that are most needed. In this example, the project's core services should include job skills training, childcare, transportation services, and a GED project. The agency should probably consider making arrangements with a health care provider for access to medical care while participants are in the project. Referral arrangements can be developed with other agencies to provide services such as emergency shelter and food, drug abuse treatment, and family counseling.

B.   Defining the Project's Target Population

Up until now, the term target population has been used in a general sense to refer to individuals within the community who face identified problems. A specific definition of the project's target population is needed to recruit and screen potential participants. Findings from the needs assessment can help you arrive at this definition. The target population will be all persons in your service area who are in need of the specific services that your project will offer.   Easily identifiable key demographic characteristics should be used in defining this population. Using the example of families who lost TANF benefits, the target population definition could be: adults between the ages of 18 and 62 living in   (*name of service area*) who have lost TANF benefits and need job skills training, child care services, transportation services, and/or completion of a GED project to become employed or maintain employment.

Exhibit III-3
Community Service Matrix

Service Provider Name	Provided Services									
	Employ-ment Services	Job Skills Training	Child Care Services	Trans-portation Service	Emergency Housing Services	Emergency Clothing/ Food	Drug Abuse Treatment	Health Care Services	GED Project	Family Counseling
Harrison Community Action	!				!					
Catholic Community Services						!				!
Southside Baptist Church			!			!				
Salvation Army		!			!	!	!			!
Metro Family Assistance					!	!	!			!
Walters Community Clinic								!		!
Green Memorial Hospital							!	!		
County Housing Authority					!					
Veterans' Outreach Center	!					!	!			!
State Employment Office	!									
Harrison County PIC	!	!								
County School District									!	

C.   Establishing Project Goals and Objectives

While the formulation of goals and objectives may appear to be an onerous task, it is an essential project planning step. Goals and objectives are simply a clarification of the participants' changes, progress, or differences that the project hopes to achieve. Establishing a project's goals and objectives is like drawing a road map. The goals are the destinations where you want to go, while the objectives are the routes that you will take to get to those destinations.

Your project may have multiple goals, and for each goal there will be several objectives. The first step is to define all of the project's goals, second is to specify measurable objectives associated with each goal. These objectives will play an important role in the construction of the logic model, which is the topic of the next section.

Project Goals

A goal is a *broadly stated condition to be achieved* by the project. Taken together, the sum of a project's goals are a statement of the intended overall project results. Goals are stated in general terms and are not necessarily measurable. Examples of stated project goals include the following:

$ Reduce welfare dependency among project participants.

$ Improve the family life of project participants.

$ Promote full-time employment among heads-of-households.

$ Improve the coordination of social and medical services for project participants.

$ Increase the self-sufficiency of served families.

$ Reduce subsequent pregnancies among teenage welfare mothers.

$ Increase the number of high school graduates among participating youths.

$ Increase asset holdings among low-income individuals.

Goals should be brief and to the point. Each goal should focus on only one intended project result. Note that goals can be limited to specific groups within the project population (e.g., youths, mothers, heads-of-households).

Project Objectives

Objectives are statements about *measurable project activities or outcomes.* Each objective should be logically related to at least one of the project goals so that the accomplishment of the objective will contribute to the achievement of a goal. An objective clearly states an action or anticipated change within a specific period of time.

Some objectives will represent project activities (e.g., screen individuals, assess participants), while other objectives will represent participant changes that are desired project outcomes. The first set of objectives is frequently referred to as project outputs, while the latter are project impacts. Examples of project objectives related to select goals are illustrated below.

GOAL: Promote full-time employment among heads-of-households

OBJECTIVES: 1. Within 14 days of entry into the project, screen and assess all heads-of-households for employability (output).

2. After 3 months in the project, increase job skills among employable adult participants (impact).

3. Within 2 months of completing job skills training, increase the number of applications for full-time jobs submitted by project participants (impact).

4. By the end of one year, increase the number of full-time employed heads-of-households by providing transportation and childcare services (impact).

GOAL: Increase the number of high school graduates among participating youth

OBJECTIVES: 1. Within 2 months of entry into the project, assess all high-school-aged youth living with participating families for educational skills and needs (output).

2. By the end of 6 months in the project, increase the communication, reading, and math skills of participating youths by providing academic skills training sessions after school 3 days each week (impact).

3. By the end of 1 year in the project, reduce the number of days participating youths are absent from school by providing academic counseling, school lunches, and clothing for school (impact).

4. By the end of 1 year, reduce the number of days participating youths are suspended from school by providing counseling and mediation services (impact).

Note that some objectives represent project activities (e.g., screen individuals, assess participants), while other objectives represent changes experienced by participants and, as such, are project outcomes. These activities or services should be those designed to address the target population's needs that were identified during the needs assessment. In evaluation terms, these services are the project's "interventions" and should be designed so as to bring about individual, family, or community level change.

Expectations for Participant Change

The list of project objectives should include ones which explicate expectations for *change* in the behavior or circumstances of the participants. For example, participants in a REACH project are expected to decrease their use of energy through conservation methods. AFIA participants are expected to increase their asset "holdings" at the end of the project. In evaluation terms, these changes are your project "outcomes" or "impacts."

It is not unusual for planners, managers, and staff to have overly ambitious expectations about the changes that will occur among participants as a consequence of project activities. Based on their own experiences, project staff often overestimate the adaptability of project participants. It is important that expectations be grounded in reality. Typically, project participants require more time to make changes than the persons who plan and deliver the project services. Project staff are frequently in a better position to make life changes than are project participants. Project staff usually have access to more resources or assets to support personal life changes. Moreover, some segments of the target population may face more problems than other segments and may be expected to accomplish less change during a specified period of time. For example, homeless persons usually require longer time periods to obtain employment than do persons who are not homeless.

It is important to set *realistic* expectations for change. Expectations that are set too high can result in a negative assessment of project participant changes and project accomplishments. They can also discourage participants. Expectations that are set too low can lead to unnecessary use of project resources and encourage over-dependency on the project. The more experience you have in working with the project's target population, the more likely you will be able to set realistic expectations. If the new project will be your first experience working with the target population, you can strengthen your expectations for change by gathering some additional information during the initial needs assessment process. Queries about desired participant changes can be added to those questions asked during community hearings, key informant surveys, and/or focus groups. These questions should address the types of change that can be expected of individuals in the target population, what steps have to take place before each desired change can occur, and how long it will take a typical participant to achieve the desired changes. A careful review of the literature on the problem and the target population, as well as similar types of interventions, can also be helpful.

Establishing realistic expectations involves *specifying* when each milestone is expected to occur for the typical project participant. For example, participants may be expected to complete an employment training curriculum 3 months after they start the training. Sometimes it may be appropriate to state a time range (e.g., 6 to 8 months) within which the desired milestone should be reached rather than a specific point in time. By specifying when a step is expected to occur, you are establishing a milestone for that change. These milestones help guide participants and staff as participants progress through the project, and they help project managers keep the project on course. The milestones also tell the evaluator when data should be collected on specific project activities (processes) and on results for participants (outcomes/impacts).

In summary, project goals represent the ultimate intended results of the project. Project objectives are statements about specific activities and outcomes that must be achieved before the project goals can be realized. Each objective should be measurable and include a realistic time frame within which the activity or outcome is expected to occur. These time indicators serve as project milestones that help guide service delivery and evaluation activities.

D.   Defining Your Project Interventions

The *activities or services* that the project plans to provide are the project interventions. It is not uncommon for project planners to name all the new project's services but not clearly define them. For many service providers, there is an intuitive understanding of what each project activity or service encompasses. For example, your project may offer housing assistance. The meaning of this service may be clear to your project staff, especially if they already provide housing assistance to participants. However, individuals who are not part of your project staff (e.g., potential participants, referral sources, funding agency staff, and evaluators) may have a completely different definition of housing assistance.

Defining a project intervention involves three areas of specification: 1) identifying specific service elements, 2) stating who provides the service or carries out the activity, and 3) giving the frequency with which the service is offered. To illustrate, let's assume that housing assistance includes four service elements. Participants may receive all or none of the elements, but your project is prepared to offer all four. These elements include the following:

$ Comprehensive housing assessment and referral to a housing provider

$ Provision of a Section 8 voucher

$ Assistance locating housing (may or may not include housing that accepts a voucher)

$ Counseling regarding home ownership, tenant responsibilities, etc.

Now that the elements are defined, we need to specify who provides these services, at what point in the process they are provided, and how often participants are eligible to receive them. A table like the one shown in Exhibit III-4 may help you define your project interventions.

By defining your project interventions, you are specifying important information needed for the project evaluation. You are also documenting information that can be used to train new staff, develop a policy and procedures manual, develop project brochures, and conduct other management activities.

Exhibit III-4
Sample Project Intervention Definition Table

Service Element	Who Provides Element	Frequency of Provision
Comprehensive housing assessment and referral to a housing provider	Project intake staff	At entry
	Project case managers	Initial assessment; as needed
Provision of a Section 8 voucher	Housing Authority staff	Once
Assistance locating housing	Project case managers	As needed
	Housing Authority staff	As needed
Counseling regarding home ownership, tenant responsibilities, etc.	Project case managers	Initially, and then as needed
	Housing Authority staff	Initially, and then as needed

E.   Defining Self-Sufficiency

Many welfare-to-work projects state the achievement of self-sufficiency by project participants as one of their ultimate project goals. Your project's funding agency may even provide their definition of self-sufficiency, e.g., a condition where an individual or family does not need public assistance.

For many project participants, achieving self-sufficiency is difficult because they face many barriers to this goal. Achieving self-sufficiency is therefore, for them, a process that involves overcoming a number of barriers. Consequently, it is helpful to define self-sufficiency as a process or a continuum of stepwise progressions from dependence on public assistance to independence from public assistance. Defining self-sufficiency as a continuum of steps will help to structure the project activities so that they take place when they are most beneficial to the project participants. Such a definition is useful for projects that have a funding cycle too short to permit serving participants until they become completely self-sufficient, which can take several years. A continuum definition of self-sufficiency is also useful for the project's evaluation because the definition can identify specific measurable steps in the direction of self-sufficiency.

The evaluation can focus on assessing the project's effectiveness in helping participants achieve these intermediate steps. If a sufficient number of participants achieve the intermediate steps toward self-sufficiency, there is support for the argument that the project is effective.

The progression from dependency to self-sufficiency may include the following steps:

Ÿ   Completing an educational or training project.

Ÿ   Acquiring basic job skills along with work experience.

Ÿ   Receiving key support services, such as childcare, so that the individual can accept employment.

Ÿ   Obtaining full-time employment.

Ÿ   Earning an adequate income to support a family.

Ÿ   Becoming eligible for employer-provided medical insurance.

Ÿ   Obtaining non-publicly subsidized housing.

The actual steps in the continuum to self-sufficiency need to be defined according to your project's target population. The steps in the above example may be appropriate for adult family heads of household, but are not necessarily appropriate for teenage single parents who have additional barriers that have to be met before they can become self-sufficient.

Defining the self-sufficiency continuum for your project requires an understanding of your target population's current functioning level, their experience in the world of work, and the services you and any partner agencies plan to provide. It also requires some assessment by you as to what a realistic time period is for project participants to become independent of support services and income transfer payments. Your definition should be developed in this context. There is no one definition of the self-sufficiency continuum. Much like the process for developing goals and objectives, it is important to be clear and precise as to what is meant by each step on the continuum. It also will be important task for you and your evaluator to define each step in "measurable" terms so that the evaluation can assess the effectiveness of your project related to the self-sufficiency goal.

F.   Linking Your Project Framework and the Evaluation Process

Adapting project information to an evaluation design is an iterative process that requires ongoing monitoring and effective communication between project staff and the evaluator. Regular meetings with your evaluator are critical for working through project design, evaluation design, and data collection issues that arise throughout the project design, implementation, and

evaluation process. To further enhance communication efforts, several tools exist that can help you continually link the project framework (project services, target population attributes, and desired outcomes) with the elements of effective evaluation design.

Disagreement about which project elements are most important to study has started many an evaluation down the wrong track. One excellent tool for linking the project framework with the evaluation is the *open forum*, an opportunity for pertinent information to be discussed from the various perspectives of the project manager, project staff and the evaluator. An effective open forum discussion should be guided by the type(s) of evaluation being conducted. Many funding agencies require both a process and outcome evaluation. Therefore, a discussion about important information should cover the processes of implementing and conducting the project as well as the expected project outcomes. It is important that the evaluator discuss the issues believed to be crucial to the full evaluation with project staff in a timely manner. Open forum discussions will help the project manager and the evaluator develop an optimal evaluation design for the project.

A second tool that is useful in linking the project framework to the evaluation is a *logic model*. A logic model is a graphical representation of the project and what it is intended to accomplish (see Chapter IV for a detailed presentation on how to construct and document a logic model). Logic models identify project assumptions, activities, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and final project goals. By listing these items, it is possible to visualize the relationships—both vertical and horizontal — of the various project elements to each other. As the project manager and the evaluator work together to develop the logic model, the most important project elements will surface, unrelated services to the eventual outcome may also surface, and a framework for a logical sequence of project events will be established. Project managers who have used the logic model process with their evaluators have found it very useful in establishing a common ground for the evaluation and project discussions.

These are examples of effective tools for linking the project framework with the evaluation design as the project evolves. Other approaches can also be used. Whatever method or approach for linking the project framework to the evaluation is used, it is critical that the project manager and the evaluator understand each other's views.

Once these initial steps in defining a project framework have been completed, project and evaluation staff can jointly develop the study questions and complete a study design matrix.

G.   Developing Study Questions and a Study Design Matrix

The study questions that are developed will be used to guide the overall evaluation process. Questions will usually be of a *process* and an *outcome* nature. Much like the goal and objective setting process discussed above, broad, general questions will be developed first, followed by more specific questions within the context of each broad question. It is common to have three or four broad study questions, and multiple sub-questions. For example, for the broad study question, "Was the project implemented as planned?", sub-questions might concern the

participants served and services provided, such as:

Ÿ   Were the recruited participants from the target population?

Ÿ   Were all of the planned services provided to participants?

Ÿ   How many participants received each of the project services?

This sample study question and its related sub-questions would be one of several process evaluation questions. Once the process and outcome study questions have been specified, they can be placed in the context of a study design matrix, where the questions are linked to the data collected (data elements), data sources, and data collection approaches. To illustrate, Exhibit III-5 uses the above hypothetical questions to identify data elements, data sources, and data collection approaches.

H.   Formulating a Project Hypothesis

The final step in developing the project framework is to formulate a project hypothesis to guide the outcome evaluation. A project hypothesis is a statement about the relationship between the project's services or activities and the ultimate expected participant outcomes of those services. The hypothesis predicts the participant changes that will result from participating in the project. These ultimate participant changes are the goals of the project. The outcome evaluation will be designed to test the project hypothesis.

It is important to distinguish between a project hypothesis and an evaluation hypothesis. A *project hypothesis* is a general prediction of project outcomes, while an evaluation hypothesis is a statement about the relationship between specific interventions and outcomes that can be tested. An *evaluation hypothesis* is a specification of the project hypothesis. In fact, the evaluator will develop and test a number of evaluation hypotheses relevant to the project hypothesis. To illustrate this point, suppose the project hypothesis is "Providing comprehensive case management coupled with job training and support services will result in self-sufficiency for participants in the New Beginnings Project." A related evaluation hypothesis could be, "Project participants who receive comprehensive case management, job training, and support services will have a higher full-time employment rate at the 12-month interval than matched comparison subjects who receive job training only." The evaluation hypothesis is not only more specific, it indicates how it will be tested. In this case, the full-time employment rate of project participants will be compared to that of a comparison group. The evaluator may refer to evaluation hypotheses as "research" hypotheses. Chapter VII gives more information about evaluation hypotheses and evaluation designs used to test hypotheses.

Exhibit III-5
Study Design Matrix

Study Question	Sub-Questions	Data Elements	Data Sources
Was the project implemented as planned?	Were the participants from the targeted population?	Number of participants at intake. Type of participants at intake. Service needs of participants at intake. Participant zip codes.	Participant intake form. Case management records.
	Were all of the planned services provided to participants?	Type of planned services. Type of services provided.	Grant application. Project service records. Project staff.

IV. Using a Logic Model to Design, Manage, and Evaluate Your Project[1]

Many social service project planners, directors, and evaluators have found that a logic model is a very useful tool for designing, managing, and evaluating projects. A logic model also can be an important tool for articulating your project in a grant proposal. Learning how to construct and use a logic model is fairly easy and does not require special training or skills. This chapter provides a basic understanding of logic models and explains how to develop and use them. We begin by defining what a logic model is and explaining its purposes, contents, and potential uses. We then demonstrate how to construct a logic model using a proposed homeless prevention project to illustrate the process.

A.   Logic Models and Their Purposes

A logic model is a graphic representation of a project. It shows what the project is designed to accomplish, including the services it delivers, expected outcomes of those services, and the ultimate project goals. Often displayed on a single page, a logic model shows how the project is expected to bring about changes in participants, an organization, or the community. A well-constructed logic model can be a powerful visualization of the project that displays the expected causal linkages between the project's services and the intended outcomes of those services.

A logic model is also a powerful management tool, particularly useful at the project design stage for clarifying assumptions and resource requirements as well as for assessing project performance. Logic models have been a recommended part of evaluation methodologies for many years. Project evaluators will often use a logic model to gain a clear understanding of a project, for preparing funding proposals, and to guide them in developing an appropriate evaluation design for the project.

Logic models have multiple purposes. The three primary purposes are to:

Ÿ   Specify and outline the components of a project.

Ÿ   Describe the chain of expected causal linkages between project components.

Ÿ   Show the sequence between the interventions and the outcomes.

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[1] The content of this chapter is based on a paper by John Rogard Tabori and John A. Hermann, "Logic Models: A Brief Introduction," presented at the 19th Annual Meeting of the Sociological Practice Association, Scottsdale, AZ, June 12-15, 1997.

To be most useful, a logic model should be developed during the project design phase and should depict the specific assumptions, activities, and outcomes of the project. Logic models should be reviewed periodically, particularly at the project mid- and end-points, and modified to reflect project design changes.

B.   <u>**Components and Linkages of a Logic Model**</u>

A logic model contains components and plausible linkages between those components. There are five basic components of a logic model: the underlying assumptions of a project, the project's activities, the immediate outcomes of those activities, intermediate project outcomes, and the final project goals.

1.   **Underlying assumptions.** The model begins by identifying the underlying assumptions of the project, including assumptions about: 1) the needs, problems, resources, and characteristics of the population to be served; 2) the nature and structure of the community within which the project will be placed; 3) the theories and beliefs that guided the selection and assembly of the proposed interventions or activities; and 4) the expected efficacy of the proposed interventions.

2.   **Project activities.** The underlying assumptions provide the foundation and rationale for the project's interventions and services that should next be identified.

3.   **Immediate outcomes.** Each project activity is expected to directly result in at least one immediate measurable or observable outcome (change) in participants' behaviors or circumstances, organizations, or communities.

4.   **Intermediate outcomes.** The immediate changes are expected to lead to intermediate outcomes.

5.   **Final project goals.** The expected intermediate outcomes result in the final project goals.

The general structure and flow of a logic model are shown in Exhibit 1. Plausible linkages between the model components move from left to right.   A project's underlying assumptions should provide a rationale for the project activities. If the project activities are implemented as planned, they can be expected to have certain immediate outcomes. If the immediate outcomes are realized, they should then cause or lead to more indirect distant or intermediate outcomes, which in turn should result in the project's final goals.

Exhibit 1
Logic Model Structure and Flow

Underlying Assumptions	O	Project Activities	O	Immediate Outcomes	O	Intermediate Outcomes	O	Final Project Goals

C.   Developing a Logic Model

The actual process of developing a logic model is likely to be interactive, often starting with the intended project outcomes and goals, and working backwards by identifying the activities or services needed to achieve those outcomes and goals, and then finally articulating the assumptions underlying the entire project. The process provides the project planners with the opportunity to test the validity of the intended project activities by assessing the accuracy of the assumptions on which they are based—assumptions about the expected participants and their resources and problems.

During the project planning stage, project staff should try to clearly document each of the five components listed in part B above, and elaborated below.

Articulate the underlying assumptions or the rationale for the project. These assumptions are the empirical, philosophical, and theoretical beliefs upon which the project is built. For example, the assumptions may concern the needs of expected participants, the current services available to those participants, the appropriateness of the proposed project activities, and/or the impact those activities will have upon the participants, the sponsoring organization, and the service delivery system. To illustrate, an underlying assumption of a homeless prevention project might be that a high proportion of homeless families have been evicted from public housing or publicly subsidized housing. Most social service projects have many underlying assumptions. It is important to articulate the most prominent of these assumptions so that the logic model includes the rationale for the project's design.

List the project activities. These activities are the services, interventions, and institutional arrangements implemented or offered by the project that are expected to help participants and to produce the desired changes at the individual, organizational, or system level. Each general service, intervention, and institutional activity should be identified, and, where appropriate, component services/activities should be listed. For example, case management is a common service that often consists of multiple components (e.g., case assessment, case plan development, referral to other service providers, follow-up services, and case plan evaluation). Often certain service components will have specific immediate outcomes that should be captured in the evaluation. By listing an activity's service components, the project evaluator can more easily determine which measures are needed to assess that activity's expected outcomes.

Specify the immediate project's measurable outcomes. These outcomes are the results expected from each project activity or service immediately after the service is provided. A job readiness training curriculum, for example, might be expected to result in a well developed resume, improved personal appearance for job interviews, increased knowledge of how to apply for a job, and increased job interview skills. Immediate outcomes must be expressed in terms of measurable increases, improvements, decreases, or reductions in knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, or circumstances. If project outcomes are not expressed in measurable terms, it will be difficult to determine whether those outcomes are achieved.

Specify the intermediate project outcomes. These outcomes are more distal effects that are expected to occur if the immediate outcomes are realized. The intermediate outcomes of a job readiness training curriculum are likely to be employment and increased income. Often an intermediate project outcome is the result of several immediate project outcomes. Intermediate project outcomes must also be expressed as measurable changes so that they can be assessed to see if the project is having its desired effects.

State the final project goals. These goals are the ultimate objectives or expected outcomes of the project. Some projects have only one final goal, such as the prevention of homelessness or attainment of economic self-sufficiency, while most projects have multiple final goals. If all of the desired intermediate project outcomes are realized, they should result in the final project goals. As with the other outcomes, final project goals should be expressed in measurable terms.

D. Using Logic Models

The development of a useful logic model is an interactive process that should involve the project's planners, managers, staff, and evaluator once on board. Once there is agreement that the model accurately reflects the intended project, then the logic model can be used as both a management and an evaluation tool.

A logic model can be used by a project manager as a **management tool** to:

Ÿ Help explain the project to interested individuals, potential funding sources, new project staff, and the general public. It can remain a one-page summary for a press release, for example, or serve as the basis for an elaboration in a narrative funding proposal.

Ÿ Identify the sequence for implementing the project components.

Ÿ Determine the fidelity of project implementation to the intended activities.

Ÿ Monitor project change.

A project manager can use a logic model to help make management decisions about how project activities should be organized. The logic model can also help a manager assess the entire project

implementation process and to make sure that project changes occur according to design. As a one-page picture of the project, the logic model can easily inform others of what the project is designed to accomplish.

A logic model is an **evaluation tool** used to:

Ÿ   Understand the line of reasoning the project uses in assuming that the interventions will have their intended results.

Ÿ   Determine how the project can be evaluated.

Ÿ   Determine what to measure (both process and outcome measures).

Ÿ   Determine the appropriate sequence of measurements.

Ÿ   Determine whether the evaluation correctly assesses the success of the project in achieving the stated goals.

A well-developed logic model can serve as an evaluation map, identifying what activities need to be documented in the process evaluation, and what outcomes need to be measured in the outcome evaluation. It also shows the order or sequence of expected outcomes and when they should be measured. If the funding period of a social project is too short to fully assess the accomplishment of the project's final goals, the logic model will identify which immediate and intermediate outcomes can be measured. When a project is able to achieve the expected immediate and intermediate outcomes listed in its logic model, there is a strong rational argument that the final project goals will also be achieved over time.

E.   Constructing a Logic Model

Constructing a logic model is relatively easy if a few simple steps are followed closely. However, the process can be time-consuming and intense, particularly for a team that is attempting to develop a logic model for the first time. Identifying assumptions can be revealing and lead to lengthy debate. Therefore, ample time should be set aside for the development of the logic model. From our experience, two days of full participation by key members of the project team is the minimum amount of time that should be allotted for the process we describe below.

The logic model should be developed very early in the project design phase, optimally even before a table of contents for a narrative plan or project proposal is developed. The logic model should always be developed before the project begins.

Form a planning group. As a first step, you should form a project planning group consisting of the project director, key project staff, the project planner, and, when possible, the project evaluator. The purpose of the group is to develop the logic model and to follow the subsequent

development and implementation of the project over time. The group should meet periodically to assess the validity of the logic model and make any changes necessary to assure that the model conforms with project practices.

Specify the project's goals and objectives. As a second step, the project planning group should develop a list of the ultimate or final project goals and objectives. They should include at least one goal or objective that anchors the project, such as the prevention of homelessness, the achievement of economic self-sufficiency, or a reduction in intra-family violence. Once a consensus on a final project goal or set of goals has been reached, the planning group is ready to start the process of developing a logic model for the project.

Each of the project goals must be measurable in principle; that is, it must be possible to know when a goal has been achieved or when significant progress toward it has been accomplished. For example, the planning group may define "*a significant reduction in the number of community members evicted from public housing*" as a desirable goal. In order to determine whether this goal has been achieved, it must be reformulated as a measurable objective. This is done by restating the goal in concrete, numeric terms, such as "*to achieve a 50 percent reduction in non-criminal evictions from public housing within two years*." This measurable objective forms the link between the general aims of the project and the logic model.

Identify the model's components. At this point, the planning group is ready to develop the contents of the logic model. Work on the model will start by providing each person in the group with five blank pages with headers that correspond to each of the major logic model components:

$ (1) Assumptions.

$ (2) Project Activities.

$ (3) Immediate Outcomes.

$ (4) Intermediate Outcomes.

$ (5) Final Project Goals.

Exhibit 2 shows what the underlying assumptions sheet might look like. Sheets for Project Activities, Immediate Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes, and Final Goals should be set up following the same format.

This is a group activity. No group member should feel that they have to identify every assumption, activity, or outcome. It is important to be as clear and concise as possible when listing an item. Each group member should keep clear notes about how each of the items they list might be documented or implemented on a separate piece of paper. These notes should be attached to the five sheets respectively.

Each member of the group can complete each sheet independently, or in consultation with one or two associates. Alternatively, the planning group can work on the logic model collectively. On the sheet titled "Assumptions," planning group members should list the underlying factors, conditions, and social and behavioral relationships they believe will influence project activities, or have a significant impact on the achievement of the final project goals. While any number of items could be listed under assumptions, three sets of items are of particular relevance: 1) *critical participant characteristics*, 2) *project resources*, and 3) *underlying causal beliefs.*

Participant characteristics or circumstances can create programmatic needs and constrain solutions. For example, the probability that an individual can escape homelessness is dependent on whether he or she is employed, recently unemployed, or long-term unemployed. And the ability of the individual to manage finances sufficiently to maintain a home could depend on whether he or she has a bank account or lives on a cash-and-carry basis.

The ability of a project to intercede in preventing homelessness will depend on the *resources* it has to avert an immediate crisis, or guide a participant toward self-sufficiency. Immediate crises may require emergency funds and access to legal assistance. And long-term prevention of homelessness may assume the availability of jobs and appropriate job training programs, as well as any needed supportive services. If the project is to be successful, it must identify these resources and verify their availability.

Finally, it is crucial to identify assumptions about *causal relationships*. It is not uncommon for many social service projects to assume that increasing the participant knowledge and skills will lead to behavior change and movement toward self-sufficiency. In some cases, increases in knowledge will lead to behavioral change; however, in most cases, it will not. It is important to identify these causal assumptions in order to understand both the constraints on, and the potential for, the success of a project. By articulating these causal assumptions, project planners identify the program theory that underpins the project.

The "Activities" list should include the project elements, clustered by the *activities* that are to be conducted or the *services* to be provided. For example, if the project is going to provide case management, all of the direct services to be provided by "case workers" should be listed under case management. Educational and training services might be under another block, employment services under another, support services such as child care and transportation services under another, etc.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                              Exhibit 2                                │
│                   Underlying Assumptions Sheet                        │
│                                                                       │
│                                                                       │
│   1.  Homelessness has exceptionally deleterious effects on individuals, families, and the │
│       community.                                                      │
│                                                                       │
│   2.  Our community has a high rate of homelessness.                  │
│                                                                       │
│   3.  A significant proportion of the homeless (long-term and short-term) have been evicted │
│       from public housing or publicly subsidized housing.            │
│                                                                       │
│   4.  A significant proportion of the private and public local service organizations lack │
│       resources or mechanisms for assisting individuals who are at high risk of eviction, or of │
│       losing their housing.                                           │
│                                                                       │
│   5.  Homelessness can be prevented through appropriate interventions. │
│                                                                       │
│   6.  People are evicted because of economic conditions.              │
│                                                                       │
│   7.  etc.                                                            │
│                                                                       │
│   Note:   Set up sheets for Project Activities, Immediate Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes, and Final │
│           Goals following the same format.  No individual should feel that they have to identify every │
│           assumption, activity, or outcome.  Be as clear and concise as possible when listing an item. │
│           Each individual should keep notes as to how the item might be documented or implemented │
│           on a separate piece of paper.  The notes should be attached to the five sheets.  Each author │
│           should be clear about which item they are referring to.  While colleagues in the planning │
│           group may be quite intelligent, they probably are not mind readers. │
│                                                                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Immediate Outcomes include all direct and virtually *instantaneous* outcomes of the project activities. These outcomes should be obvious and easy to measure. For example, an individual who has gone into arrears on the rent and is facing eviction is in need of "emergency eviction interdiction services," including emergency funds, mediation services, and legal services. The immediate outcome of these services would be "eviction prevented," measured as either "yes" or "no."

Intermediate Outcomes include expected changes that follow the immediate outcomes. If we follow the previous example, the list might include the ability to make regular rental payments and a steady payoff of the rent in arrears. If the proportion of individuals who achieve success exceeds previous experience, and the overall eviction rate drops as a consequence, then a first step has been reached in meeting the ultimate or final project goal.

It is important to understand two aspects of the example that has been outlined. First, the example demonstrates that a project that targets only one narrow aspect of a general problem can reduce the impact of the problem. If 40 percent of all evictions are economic (failure or inability to pay rent), a 50 percent reduction in economic evictions would result in an overall drop in the eviction rate of 20 percent, all other factors remaining equal. Second, the example points to the constraints and the large number of issues that a project may face in implementing even a narrowly defined prevention service. While economic reasons may bring a family to the brink of eviction, there are usually additional factors that influence the income earning capacity of the family and its ability to pay rent over time. These other factors can include everything from poor financial management skills to systematic entanglement with the criminal justice system to a poor or worsening local economy. A carefully constructed list of assumptions, activities and outcomes will flow logically from one to another and will capture these issues.

In outlining the steps to building a logic model, we have gone from the final project goals to the assumptions, and then back again to the final project goals. However, it is not necessary to follow this particular order. In fact, many individuals, particularly project planners and staff who are experienced in social service delivery, find it easier to start with activities and build backwards to assumptions and forward to the final goal(s). Project planners and staff may also find it easier to ground themselves in activities because activities reflect their everyday work experience. It is always easier to begin a project on familiar ground. What is important is not whether you start with assumptions, activities or final goals, but that the key assumptions underlying the project activities are identified; that every activity has at least one measurable immediate outcome associated with it; that every immediate outcome prompts an intermediate outcome; and that the relationships among each of the model's five components are clear and make sense.

Consolidate the model's components. Once planning group members have created lists of assumptions, activities, outcomes (immediate and intermediate), and final goals, they are ready to consolidate these components onto a "logic model sheet" (see Exhibit 3). This process begins by writing down one assumption in the left hand column then working across the sheet (from left to right), listing the project activities associated with that assumption. Next, the immediate outcomes of those activities should be listed, followed by the intermediate outcomes, and then the final project goals. This string of assumptions, activities, and outcomes roughly should be in line in a row. After this first string is completed, start the next by writing down the second assumption along with its associated activities and outcomes. This process is repeated until all assumptions have been displayed, and all activities and outcomes are documented.

Exhibit 3
Initial Logic Model Sheet
A Homeless Prevention Project to Reduce Economic Evictions

ASSUMPTIONS	ACTIVITIES	IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	FINAL Project GOALS
Homelessness can be prevented through appropriate interventions. Economic evictions are the immediate cause of a significant percent of homelessness Social service providers lack eviction prevention projects or resources. Economic distress often is the product of multiple causes.	Emergency Eviction Interdiction Services: - Emergency funds - Mediation services - Legal services Case Management - Assessment - Family development plan - Financial management Referral Services Employment Services and Job Development	Eviction Prevented Personal and Family Financial Management Improved Help for Health and Welfare Needs Found Job Found	Eviction Threat Permanently Abated Family Economic Stability Improved Employment Maintained - Wages above poverty level - Fringe benefits secured - Unemployment minimized	Economic Eviction Rate Significantly Down Self-Sufficiency Rate of Families Increased Risk of Eviction Reduced Eviction Prevention Services Permanently Established

It should be noted that an activity may have more than one underlying assumption, and that each activity can lead to multiple immediate outcomes, and that immediate outcomes can have more than one intermediate outcome. Because of these possible multiple linkages, logic models can be fairly complex. Although accuracy in displaying the plausible linkages between a model's components is important, it is also important to avoid making the model too complicated. Activities should be consolidated as much as possible, and outcomes that cannot or will not be measured during the evaluation should not be included in the model.

Identify the linkages between components. Transferring the information to the logic model sheet allows the observer to start visualizing interactions and linkages between the blocks of assumptions, activities, and outcomes. These linkages are, in effect, *causal relationships*. Assumptions should drive activities, which in turn should drive outcomes. Immediate outcomes should drive intermediate outcomes, and intermediate outcomes should drive or lead to final outcomes. When constructing the linkages, the group should use a pencil to draw the arrows, because changes in the model components are common during the planning process. It is not unusual to find assumptions that do not lead to an activity or intervention, or an activity that has no immediate outcome. For example, economic literacy might be listed as an immediate outcome of a set of activities. However, if none of the activities specifies economic literacy training or education as an element, it is likely that economic literacy will increase systematically, and it would not be possible to specify why it increased. In either case, the planning group may find that critical programmatic changes will have to be made, or expectations adjusted. In the particular example at hand, either economic literacy will have to be dropped as an expectation or a literacy training course will have to be added to the project activities. When all of the causal linkages between the project components have been drawn, the logic model is complete. The final logic model should look like the example provided in Exhibit 4.
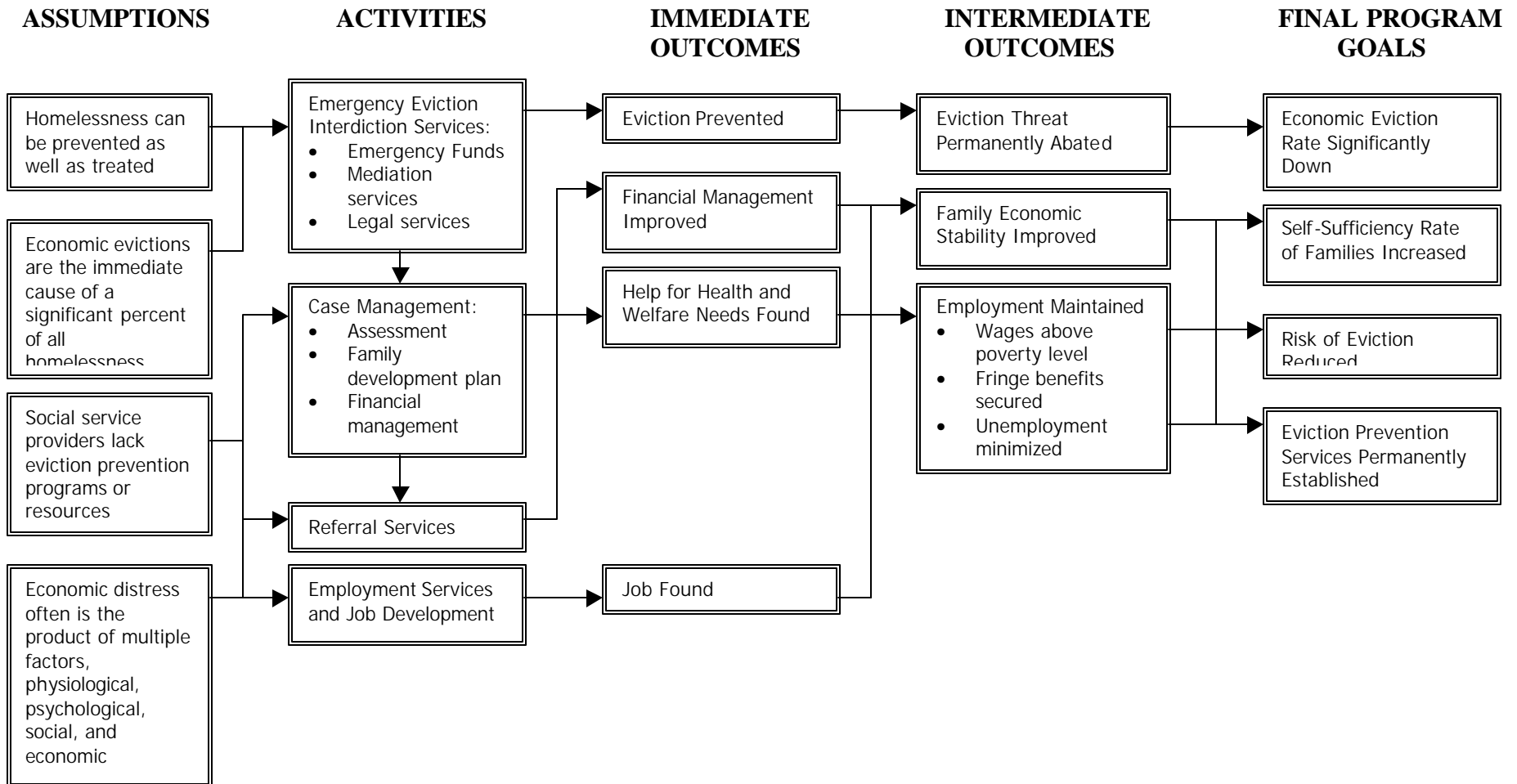
Review and critique the model. After the full logic model has been completed, the planning group should review the model. Two questions are particularly important during the review process: (1) Have the necessary resources been assigned to ensure that the activities will achieve the desired outcomes? (2) Are the relationships between assumptions, activities, and outcomes well enough documented that (a) causality can be established or imputed, and (b) impact can be measured? Affirmative answers to these questions will assure that the project is run according to specifications, and has been designed with the ability to describe and document outcomes.

Upon completion of the logic model, the planning group should make it available to project staff along with supporting documentation. It is appropriate at this point to release the model for comment to any project advisory council or group that supports the project. With their fresh perspective, hey may be able to suggest useful adjustments to the model. After an agreement has been reached, project management can use the logic model to prepare project funding proposals and, once operational, as a benchmark to assess project performance over time. Are the activities being implemented and carried out consistently? Are the expected immediate outcomes being achieved? Are the intermediate and long-term objectives being reached? Are fewer families made homeless? Are more individuals and families achieving economic self-sufficiency?

Exhibit 4
Logic Model
A Homeless Prevention Program: Economic Evictions

ASSUMPTIONS	ACTIVITIES	IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	FINAL PROGRAM GOALS

Homelessness can be prevented as well as treated

Economic evictions are the immediate cause of a significant percent of all homelessness

Social service providers lack eviction prevention programs or resources

Economic distress often is the product of multiple factors, physiological, psychological, social, and economic

Emergency Eviction Interdiction Services:
- Emergency Funds
- Mediation services
- Legal services

Case Management:
- Assessment
- Family development plan
- Financial management

Referral Services

Employment Services and Job Development

Eviction Prevented

Financial Management Improved

Help for Health and Welfare Needs Found

Job Found

Eviction Threat Permanently Abated

Family Economic Stability Improved

Employment Maintained
- Wages above poverty level
- Fringe benefits secured
- Unemployment minimized

Economic Eviction Rate Significantly Down

Self-Sufficiency Rate of Families Increased

Risk of Eviction Reduced

Eviction Prevention Services Permanently Established

Update the model. As noted above, a project logic model should be periodically updated to reflect changes in service delivery and expected project outcomes. In a very real sense, logic models should be dynamic and grow with the project. Updating a logic model can be done at set points in time (e.g., annually) or when the project moves from one implementation stage to the next (e.g., introduction of new service components). Regardless of when updating occurs, it is important that key stakeholders be involved in the process. These stakeholders are likely to include project management and staff, advisory group members, participants, and the project evaluator. Updating a logic model does not require the group to go back and reenact all the steps taken to develop the original model. The process should begin with the existing model, comparing it to the current project. Changes in underlying assumptions, project activities, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and even final goals should be noted. The identified changes can then be incorporated into the model.

V.   Finalizing Your Evaluation Plan

Frequently one of the criteria for reviewing and assessing OCS grant applications is the evaluation or data collection plan. For example, both the DPP and REACH grant programs require the project to develop an evaluation plan at the proposal stage, and to hire a third party evaluator, and to report on the evaluation findings at a national conference. The IDA program requires the projects to dedicate resources to data collection and to cooperate with the national evaluation effort. Demonstration project grant announcements frequently list a number of elements that must be included in the evaluation plan in order to receive the maximum points allocated to that portion of the application. These elements are also important and necessary in order to properly evaluate the project should a grant be awarded. This section discusses the requirements for the initial evaluation plan, the technical assistance offered, and the process of finalizing the evaluation plan.

A.   The Initial Plan

When an evaluation plan is required in an OCS grant application, generally it should include the following elements:

1.   *A working definition of the condition addressed by the project*, such as self-sufficiency, homeless prevention, energy self-sufficiency, and/or asset accumulation, that permits measurement of incremental movement from dependency on public assistance toward achievement of the listed goals.

2.   *A process evaluation that assesses*:

$ Partnerships
$ Staffing
$ Policies and procedures
$ Participant outreach
$ Services
$ Process for provision of services
$ Applicant and community linkages
$ Other community resources
$ Changes from the original plan
$ Critical elements of project implementation
$ Implementation summary

3.   *An outcome or impact evaluation that clearly specifies*:

$ Hypothesis
$ Design
$ Sample size
$ Project participant selection and assignment
$ Interventions
$ Outcomes
$ Measurement instruments
$ Number and timing of measurements
$ Data collection procedures
$ Statistical analysis procedures

4.   *An adequate sample size* in both the participant and comparison groups and the rationale
        for their selection.

The OCS understands that project personnel applying for a demonstration grant are not
evaluators, researchers, or statisticians. This guide includes a section on "Selecting and Working
with your evaluator." *It would be advantageous to identify and select an evaluator during the
grant preparation period and involve the evaluator in the preparation of the initial evaluation
plan for the grant application.* However, if this is not possible, the OCS post-award activities
have built-in technical assistance, review, and revision stages that will result in a final evaluation
plan that reflects the project's assumptions, goals, objectives, interventions, target population,
and operational definition of self-sufficiency.

B.   The Role of the Technical Assistance Contractor

The OCS Demonstration and Special Projects Division frequently contracts with management
consulting firms to:

$ Provide technical assistance to grantees on the development of their project and the
        project evaluation design, and

$ Assist in the dissemination of project results.

In performing the technical assistance function, the contractor reviews the grant applications and
initial evaluation plans, develops project summaries, and performs critical analyses of the project
design and evaluation plans. The contractor conveys these comments to the grantees and helps
them improve their initial evaluation plans through correspondence, teleconferences, and an
evaluation workshop.

In helping OCS to disseminate project results, the technical assistance contractors are responsible
for producing fact sheets on project highlights, developing draft and final project reports to
publish as monographs or submit to the DHHS Secretary or Congress, and assisting with annual

outcome workshops and cluster learning conferences. In conducting these activities, they usually work very closely with the grant recipients.

## C.	Post-Award Activities

Beginning in the first quarter of each grant cycle, the technical assistance contractor reviews the grant applications and initial evaluation plans of new grantees, perhaps a summary of each grantee proposal and plan for OCS, as well as comments and questions to be raised with the grantees. A copy of this review form used by the contractor appears as Appendix B to this guide.

Within the first month, the comments and questions are sent to the grantees along with a suggested time for a teleconference, which will include the grant project director, the grantee's evaluator, the contractor's evaluation specialist who reviewed the grant, and the OCS project officer.

Teleconferences are usually held during the last week of that month. They typically last 1 to 2 hours and allow the parties to discuss the technical assistance contractor's questions and comments as well as questions/concerns of the grantee and grantee's evaluator. Following the teleconference, the technical assistance contractor summarizes the discussions and the agreements reached and sends this summary to the grantee. During the first 3 weeks of the second month, the grantees revise their initial evaluation or data collection plan based upon teleconference discussions.

The grantees bring this revised evaluation plan to an evaluation workshop which normally is held in Washington, DC. At a minimum, the grantee's project manager and project evaluator are required to attend this workshop, which lasts 2 - 2 ½ days. The purpose of the evaluation workshop is to review the issues explored in this guidebook, to conduct work groups on the use of logic models, and to allow individual consultations with grantees on their revised evaluation plan.

Within two weeks following the workshop, the grantees make any final adjustments to their plans and submit their final evaluation plan. The final evaluation plans are reviewed by the technical assistance contractor who prepares final recommendations for OCS. OCS then issues letters to the grantees about their final evaluation plans. In some cases, OCS has required grantees to make additional modifications to their evaluation plans before proceeding.

VI.   The Evaluation Process

This section explores the evaluation process. Although evaluation research is often thought of as occurring outside project parameters, we view it as an integral part of any project that depends on an implied or explicit demonstration of effectiveness for its resources.

In this chapter we will look at the relationship between project design, implementation, and evaluation; introduce three forms of evaluation; and examine the collection and analysis of data. The three forms of evaluation are:

$ Formative evaluation,

$ Process evaluation, and

$ Outcome or impact evaluation.

Each of these evaluation models carries a different set of requirements for resources and analytical/statistical understanding. The first two approaches are most effective for assessing project implementation and the quality of service delivery. Outcome evaluation measures the impact of the project on the participant and attempt to answer the question of whether the project made a difference. While OCS does not require formative evaluations, the concept is introduced because many agencies carry them out as a part of their effort to monitor the implementation process.

A.   The Relationship Between Project Design, Project Implementation, and Evaluation

The design and implementation of complex social service projects is not an easy task. Conducting formative and process evaluations are ways to help ensure high quality, cost-effective service delivery. Good evaluation research can enhance project design and implementation. However, good evaluation research is not easy. It requires careful planning and execution, attention to detail, and considerable effort. Doing so enriches the project planner's understanding of what needs to be done and points the way to adjustments that can increase project effectiveness.

Good evaluation research also requires organizational commitment. In order to carry out a successful project evaluation, it is necessary to create a capacity to collect, aggregate, and analyze data. As pointed out previously, consistency and precision in the collection of data are critical.

It is important to note that many valuable project concepts fail not because of theoretical flaws, but because practical issues and problems are not identified until it becomes too late. Project designers may have assumed too much or too little education on the part of the target population.

Implementation issues may arise that were not thought of during the project planning process. It may be found that specially trained case and social workers are needed to deal with mental health issues. In other words, it is not unusual for adjustments in the way services are delivered to be necessary during the early stages of project implementation. A solid, internal capacity to carry out evaluation research enhances the likelihood that the need for such adjustments will be discovered early in the implementation process. As such, evaluation research capabilities are a powerful tool in the hands of project managers to ensure effectiveness and minimize the diversion of resources. Additionally, positive results from a well-designed evaluation can bolster arguments for the continuation of funding. During a time of tight budgets, this is not a trivial point. However, there is a cost to building an internal evaluation capacity. Staff must be trained and they must commit a minimal amount of time to the process.

Creating an internal evaluation capacity also has the potential for supporting future project activities. In building an evaluation capacity, the project will have to balance the costs against the benefits. The project manager will have to engage the project staff and convince them that evaluation is consistent with their mission. Their primary goal, after all, is to deliver services, not to evaluate them. Evaluation research must never become the goal in-and-of itself. It must be seen as a tool that supports the delivery of more and better services to the participant.

B.   Formative Evaluation

A formative evaluation can be one of the most useful tools available to a project planner. It is also the easiest of the evaluation tools for non-specialists to implement. A well-designed formative evaluation acts like a feedback loop sending critical data back to project personnel about the effectiveness of the project in reaching early objectives. The results of a formative evaluation also can be used to "perfect" the project logic model.

It is important to recognize that formative evaluations occur after project objectives have been spelled out and the steps leading to each objective have been mapped out clearly. For example, a project objective may be to recruit and place 100 eligible person in a job training project. The steps leading to the recruitment and placement need to be identified and listed. The steps may involve the identification of a list of potential participants and the establishment of an outreach strategy. Intake and assessment interviews will have to be planned and selection criteria put into place. Project designers will have to estimate the ratio of actual to potential recruits and estimate the time it will take to complete the recruitment process.

As the recruitment process is mapped out, points will be identified where "snap-shots" can be taken that will allow project planners to determine how the process is progressing. For example, if only one out of ten potential candidates is expected to become an actual recruit, the list of potential participants will need to include 1000 individuals. A good formative question would be: Has a pool of 1,000 potential candidates been identified? If fewer individuals exist than expected, either the eligibility criteria will need to be changed to expand the list, or the conversion ratio will need to be improved.

Another issue that often comes up is the gap between assumptions and expectations about

participant's characteristics or circumstances and the reality when he or she walks through the door. Participants may have greater alcohol and drug involvement than expected, may be in greater need of health care (mental or physical) than suspected, may be less or better educated than originally thought, or may have greater levels of criminal involvement than assumed. A number of the DPP and FSC projects were surprised by the complex patterns of drug abuse, violence, and criminal involvement that existed among their participants. More recently, Assets for Independence Act (AFIA) grantees have encountered significantly greater difficulties with credit issues and predatory lending than expected. Conversely many individuals may bring far stronger education and/or job skills than planned for by the project. Training individuals may not be the problem; obtaining access to health care and job opportunities may be the issue. Other anticipated barriers may present, such as participant's need for childcare or transportation. A number of recent studies have pointed to a work first strategy in which the first priority is a job, the second priority is keeping the job, and the third priority is career development.

Under circumstances such as these, a formative evaluation plan sensitive to the need to capture and turn around data on participant characteristics rapidly and frequently may be required. Such an evaluation will identify biases and incorrect assumptions that were incorporated into the initial project design and permit early adjustments. The obvious next question is, "How do you design and implement a formative evaluation plan?"

As a first step, a project Gantt, or Time and Task chart should be developed. Gantt charts list the key project tasks and map out the expected start and end point for each one. Each task start and end date represents a potentially useful measurement point. Questions that can be asked at these points include:

$ Did the task start on time?

$ Was the task ended on time?

$ If a task neither started nor ended on time, why not?

$ What barriers to task startup and completion were encountered?

$ Were resources adequate to the task?

$ Were the right types of resources available?

The answers to these questions will provide valuable information and assist in the development of the process evaluation.

The next step is to expand on the Gantt chart and review the linkages between tasks. The development of a PERT, or Critical Path, chart is useful to identify junctions where problems in one task may spill over into another. They can help clarify the dynamic inter-relationships between tasks. The formative evaluation plan can then be targeted to collect data *in advance of* these points, providing the project with an early warning system. It is far more difficult to carry out post-task or project fixes than to make well-thought-through timed adjustments. The

following early implementation questions can be addressed by a formative evaluation plan:

$ Have all required staff members been recruited?

$ Have all tracking and data collection instruments been developed and distributed?

$ Have all staff been trained in project procedures, including data collection?

$ Have all intake procedures been developed prior to initiation of participant recruitment and selection?

$ Have all necessary start-up tasks been completed prior to initiation of client centered project activities?

$ If start-up task completion has fallen behind, will it prevent initiation of the main project activities?

Finally, a well-designed formative evaluation plan can be invaluable in identifying discrepancies between expected and actual participant characteristics and circumstances. For example, college bound projects don't work if the entrants either lack a high school diploma or have a college degree. Job development projects are not likely to be successful in the face of severe physical and mental health problems, or high levels of substance abuse. Issues of domestic violence and criminal involvement may prevent a participant from completing a project. Uncontrollable debts or too small an income may prevent an individual from participating in an Individual Development Account or asset building project. Formative evaluations can assess the extent of these issues and focus attention on them. It is reasonable to probe the following as participants first enter the program:

$ Do participant profiles match expected profiles?

$ What problems were encountered during participant intake?

$ Were problems encountered in the recruitment of participants to the project?

$ Are there characteristics of the participants that require immediate project modification?

$ Are attrition rates higher than expected, and, if so, what are the implications for the validity and reliability of the outcome or impact evaluation?

The role of a third-party evaluator in the formative evaluation does not need to be extensive. The benefits derived from formative evaluations are primarily programmatic. The data that are collected will be garnered by project staff, often while carrying out their primary tasks. The goals and objectives of the evaluation will be set by project managers and staff.

There are two areas, however, where input from a third-party evaluator can be quite useful. During the early planning stages of a formative evaluation, an experienced evaluator can help

identify data collection tools and the best points in time to collect the data. The evaluator should also be able to assist in the design of an analytical output process that generates well-organized and timely data for project review. It makes little sense to collect data unless it results in timely and useful results.

C.   Process Evaluations: Mapping the Treatment

Process evaluations serve the purpose of documenting the operations of a project. They provide data on participant characteristics, the number of participants served, the types of activities or services used, the intensity of the services provided, staff loads and characteristics, the cost of activities, and fluctuations in service demand. Process evaluators also provide structural and organizational information on partnership interactions, staff training and education, internal agency or organizational interactions, resource allocations, and formal and informal patterns of communication. When an outside group wants to replicate the project, it is the process evaluation to which they will turn. They will want to know what happened, how it happened, what resources were used, what the mixture of resources was, and what needs to be done.

Process evaluations also provide the evaluator with the necessary baseline data to judge the intensity and reliability with which services were provided to the participants compared to members of the control or comparison groups. The evaluator will not be able to assess project outcomes without this information. Interpretation of statistical findings depends on whether there was a difference in the amount of services received by the experimental group as compared to the control group.

Process evaluations rely on what is commonly referred to as management data. These data are generally captured routinely by organizational staff when carrying out their daily tasks. The data include, for example, information on participants, number of hours spent with participants, number of referrals made, number of home visits made, time spent filling out forms, time spent in meetings, and so forth. However, the completeness and reliability of the data are not always certain. The process evaluation plan should specify the types of data that will be collected, the frequency with which they are to be collected, and the circumstances under which they should be collected.

A process evaluation plan should establish routines for capturing and managing the following types of data:

$ Participant demographics.

$ Participant contacts.

$ Participant services (what was provided to whom) or project activities.

$ Referrals.

$ Participant outcomes.

$ Staff characteristics.

$ Project activities, including data on:

  -       Staff meetings
  -       Special events
  -       Task completion
  -       Partnership meetings
  -       Advocacy activities
  -       Intrusive external events

$ Staff diaries and memos.

$ Organizational, financial, and budgetary processes.

On the surface, the types of data that will be tracked for a process evaluation would not appear to be very difficult to capture and process, but there are some hidden issues that need to be kept in mind. First, many types of demographic data are more useful when recorded in one form than another. For example, it is better to know the year in which a person was born than to know his or her chronological age, and even better to have their exact birth date. Chronological age at any point can be calculated from a birth date, and may be useful as an identifier later in the project. If the age of the person is recorded in years, it is always necessary to know the date on which the age was recorded. Many tracking systems do not track recording dates with sufficient precision to ensure the reliability of the data.

Second, participants will be more reluctant to offer some kinds of information than others. Although it may seem surprising, people are often more willing to part with sensitive personal information than income data. Since self-sufficiency studies invariably require that income data be collected, consideration must be given to multiple measurement procedures to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Sources for these measurements beyond the individual participant may include the Social Security Administration (Statement of Annual Earnings), payroll checks or stubs, W-2 forms, state departments of labor or unemployment offices, and state or local welfare offices (if the individual is receiving public assistance).

Third, methods for cross-linking contact, service, referral, and outcome data will need to be developed and put in place. Participants who use numerous services are quite different from those that use only one or two. The intensity and frequency of usage is also an important matter that may differentiate participants. The only way that these dimensions can be accurately measured is if tracking systems exist that identify individual participants. Not all Community Action Agencies or Community Based Organizations have such tracking systems in place.

Fourth, routine methods will need to be put in place to accumulate, abstract, and code project data that may be scattered in multiple places and files. For example, it is rare that one person goes to every project-related meeting. However, if key implementation and partnership issues are to be tracked and their effect evaluated, a central file where a copy of every meeting agenda

is kept needs to be maintained. A standardized method for keeping meeting notes must also be developed, and copies of the notes must be routinely deposited in the central files. It will be too difficult for the evaluator to attempt to track down meeting notes and agendas at the end of the project, and individuals' memories concerning detailed events at meetings are notoriously unreliable.

Finally, if staff diaries and project financial data are to be used, an abstract and coding methodology must be developed for both. The method must protect the privacy of individuals while ensuring that useful, programmatic data are made available for analysis.

The process evaluation plan should be developed by the third-party evaluator with extensive input by project managers and staff. As noted, it should specify the data to be collected and the schedule for data collection. It should clearly outline the coding rules for transferring data from participant records to coding sheets. It should make clear the rules that govern the management of the data, including privacy protections. It should identify the format for recording events in a diary or other narrative documents. It should describe a data management system that ensures the integrity and accurate processing of the data.

The fact that the third-party evaluator will have major responsibility for the plan does not mean that project management personnel can abdicate responsibility for review. The plan should not be developed in a vacuum. It will be project staff who will have to implement data collection. If they have not been consulted on the process, they may balk at implementing the plan, or they may implement it with little enthusiasm, or they may even sabotage it. It takes some organization and commitment to routinely collect, abstract, and code data. If diaries are to be kept, self-discipline will be needed. Project diaries must be kept up daily and must contain detailed information if they are to be effective. Completing them takes time and focus. Staff who have been kept out of the planning process and who feel no ownership may be less likely than those involved from the outset to provide a good product. The more project managers and evaluators collaborate in the design of the process evaluation plan, the more likely that it will be executed with finesse and attention. The more project staff is part of the planning process, the more they will commit to the evaluation and follow through on the data collection requirements.

D.   Outcome Evaluations: Did You Make a Difference?

Ultimately, the most important question to be answered is whether the project made a difference to the participants. Did it make them more self-sufficient? Did it improve the quality of their lives? Did it open up opportunities for them? Did it motivate them to seek more opportunities, such as education and better jobs? Were they able to reduce and better manage their expenses? Were they able to acquire needed or desired assets? It is the purpose of an outcome evaluation to ask and answer these questions.

Outcome evaluations are usually the most statistically oriented of the three evaluation types explored here. Knowledge and experience are needed to set up and carry out outcome evaluations. The analytical models and statistical techniques that are used are not always easy to

grasp, and the results that are produced can often be counter-intuitive. As a consequence, there is a strong tendency for project staff to back away and leave the whole matter to a third-party evaluator.

Staff discomfort is often abetted by the jargon and technical terms common to evaluation specialists and statisticians. While jargon and technical terms may have precise meaning to professionals, to the layperson they are confusing and may produce suspicion. Further, some techniques used by evaluators to assess project effectiveness raise ethical problems for project staff and may be seen as interfering with project implementation. The concept of denying service to control groups is particularly difficult for agency personnel to accept, since their standing mission is to provide service and benefits to those in need, not to deny them help.

There is great irony in these concerns. A well-conceived evaluation study is often a powerful tool for fund-raising and budget enhancement. Successful projects and programs may also prompt public policy or legislation to institutionalize the new approaches. Incontrovertible proof that a project works is hard to beat. Outcome studies also make the greatest demands on the project staff for cooperation and involvement. Data collection, abstracting, and coding must be done systematically, carefully, and precisely. In most cases, it is project staff that must carry out this data collection. Of the three evaluation approaches, outcome evaluation requires the most precision, but also promises the greatest project benefits.

E.   The Data Collection Plan

The importance of having a well-articulated data collection plan cannot be overestimated. It will guide the daily activities of staff who are part of the data collection effort. The data collection plan should be developed collaboratively by the third-party evaluator and from project staff. Remember, *frequently it is the project staff that will carry out most of the data collection in a demonstration project*. This point cannot be emphasized enough.

A strong data collection design is characterized by clarity, simplicity, redundancy of procedures, and administrative control. Above all other factors, clarity is key. Project staff must understand why they are collecting data on each item and how each item will be used to analyze project outcomes. The data collection design must *clearly* articulate its purpose and all classification rules. Without purpose, there will be little motive to comply; without clearly defined classification rules, coding will be imprecise and may make it impossible to interpret the data.

Simplicity is also necessary to achieve reliable compliance with the plan. The more complicated a design, the less likely that the data will be collected consistently and accurately. Complicated data collection procedures often burden staff with difficult paperwork. Complex decision rules can lead to unreliable coding and staff frustration. It is generally understood that the more complicated a coding scheme, the less likely an item will be completed, or if completed, correctly completed. Complicated schemes also take more time to complete and administer. They increase the response burden associated with each item and reduce the number of coding events that can occur in a specified period of time. A straightforward example of this problem is

"age." An individual's age can be recorded or determined by asking for their date of birth, their age at the time of the interview, or by asking them to respond to indicate within which of a set of age brackets they fall. While all are valid methods, the first (date-of-birth) is the quickest to ask and yields the most reliable answer. The actual age of an individual can be calculated for any date. It is a simple method, it is easy to understand, and it yields reliable results. The second method, while also easy to ask, requires the questioner to record the asking date. Unless the interviewer is working with a computerized interview system, she will have to pause for a second or two to record the interview date. The last type of question (age bracket) takes the longest time to ask and is the least precise of the three question forms. It requires the interviewer to read the list of age brackets, record the response correctly, and record a response date.

Redundancy in data entry is closely associated with precision and accuracy and is a common practice. It is not unusual for key-entry operators to double-punch and verify data to ensure accuracy. Redundancy in other areas is also useful. For example, multiple measurements of income are useful to ensure relative accuracy. Problems such as substance abuse often will remain hidden unless probed from different angles.

Administrative control is essential. Project personnel will need to be reminded of upcoming data collection events, will have to be periodically trained or retrained in data collection activities, and will need a point to refer to when coding issues arise. It is not reasonable to expect that the third-party evaluator will always be available on site, or even a phone call away. An administrative control plan provides the basis for managing the data collection process on site and structuring relationships between the evaluator and project staff.

F.   Comparison Groups

One of the most difficult issues in evaluation research is the control or comparison group. The construction of comparison groups often requires the consideration of relatively complex problems in methodology and statistics. For individuals doing research on self-sufficiency, additional unique issues arise, including the ethics of service denial and the problem of attrition rates among those in the comparison group. However, before the techniques of comparison group construction are examined, it is useful to describe the logic and role of comparison groups in experimental and quasi-experimental research.

A comparison or control group is called for when critical elements of the "experiment" or demonstration are not under the control of the researcher. For example, Community Action Agencies or Community Based Organizations ordinarily are not able to influence local employment or unemployment rates, or general economic activity. Therefore, assuming that unemployment rates go down for demonstration project participants, how are the data to be interpreted? Is it because of the project or is it because the local labor market has expanded? Without a control or comparison group consisting of individuals who have not participated in the project, it is impossible to tell. A comparison group serves as a "check" against external factors that might explain changes observed in the experimental population equally well.

Obviously, the two groups need to be as similar as possible. The fewer the differences, the fewer the number of competing hypotheses that can be developed to explain outcomes. For example, if the educational level of one group is significantly higher than the other, this can seriously impair judgments about project impact as individuals with high levels of education are more likely to obtain a job and command higher salaries than those without.

The easiest method for creating comparable groups is to draw individuals from a single pool or population and randomly assign them to a treatment or control group. Randomized assignment of this kind is a hallmark of true experimental designs. There are two serious difficulties with this approach that need to be kept in mind when designing a project.

First, it is difficult to cushion the impact on an individual who is randomly assigned to a control group. Individuals who find themselves in the control group are painfully aware that they have been "denied" an opportunity. Unlike placebos in medical trials, it is difficult to hide the lack of treatment in social experiments. As a result there may be subtle effects of assignment to a control group that produce group differences on post-tests unrelated to the demonstration activity. Individuals in the control group may not be willing to be re-interviewed at the end of the project. Since there is little incentive for these individuals to maintain contact with the project, they may also be very difficult to locate at the end of the project. In addition, the formation of a control group may produce the awkward effect of making the project look like it is denying services. This can have a demoralizing effect on the staff.

A second problem that can afflict random assignment is the size of the eligible population. In some areas, particularly less populated ones, the number of individuals that can be recruited to the project may not be sufficient to fill both an experimental and a control group. Usually the control group suffers. Even with only modest attrition rates, the size of the control group may fall below statistically reliable levels. Without incentives to stay in touch with the project, these groups' attrition rate may be significantly high.

As a consequence of these factors, most evaluation plans rely on non-equivalent control group designs. A non-equivalent control group is usually composed of randomly selected individuals that are demographically similar, but are located in another area or are participating in another project. The use of non-equivalent control groups also introduces practical and theoretical problems.

It is exceedingly difficult to control for the impact of external events on a non-equivalent control group. Almost by definition, it will be subject to different experiences and display different characteristics than those of the experimental group. There are a number of analytical techniques that can be used to introduce statistical controls for these differences. (They include analysis of covariance [ANCOVA] and multiple analysis of covariance [MANCOVA].) As with most statistical techniques, these designs make assumptions about the data and require minimal sample sizes. If the sample size becomes too small, these techniques lose "power", that is, lose the ability to detect significant differences between groups.

The complex trade-offs that exist between the use of different types of control groups underlines the importance of discussing the matter thoroughly with a third-party evaluator. In particular, it

is critical to determine the sample sizes required in order to measure effect. The sample size will have to factor in attrition rates from both the experimental and the control group. For example, if you need to have at least 50 people in your control group at the end of a one-year project and you expect an attrition rate of 50 percent per annum, you will need to recruit 100 control group members. This scenario has potentially serious cost implications.

In order to estimate attrition rates from the control group, it's appropriate to   look at attrition rates from other projects that serve the same population or a similar population. It is also better to overestimate attrition and over-recruit than to underestimate. A control group that is too small in size makes it impossible to carry out comparative analysis and judge the efficacy of the project.

Finally, no matter whether you elect to use a randomized or non-equivalent control group design, assignment to the experimental and the control or comparison groups should be by a random method. The use of a non-random sample selection technique may weaken, if not destroy, the statistical validity of your conclusions. Difficulty in ensuring that selection is by a random method should not lead you to abandon the use of the control group. While conclusions drawn from a comparison group design are not as strong as those from a true experimental design, they still are much better than a design that lacks any comparison group. Without a comparison group of some kind, it becomes nearly impossible to attribute changes in participant behavior or status to the program.

G.   Statistical Analysis

There is a general tendency to regard statistics with suspicion. They are something that many people believe should be left to the "experts." Although statistical analysis in the formal sense usually requires minimal levels of training and experience, useful results can be achieved through examining counts, percentages, and averages. Simple accumulative tables can be used to follow project developments and to identify operational issues. The implications of discovering that 20 percent of one's participants are drug abusers as opposed to a planned 1 percent is significant. Similarly, different mixes of educational attainment and family arrangements can have implications for the channeling of project resources into remedial education efforts, childcare needs, and housing placement.

The planning and construction of simple tables has another beneficial effect. It forces a consideration of the factors that can influence project implementation and success. For example, a number of Demonstration Partnership Programs and Family Support Center projects have identified domestic violence as a critical risk factor leading to homeless and welfare dependency, with particularly strong impacts on women and children. The evidence indicates that abused women are far less likely to achieve self-sufficiency than non-abused women unless given strong psychological support. Abused children and children who live in homes where systematic spousal abuse occurs are less likely to thrive at school. If a project wishes to track the problem and develop successful interventions, they will have to develop:

$ A data collection instrument that accurately and reliably captures domestic violence information both on intake and on a continuing basis,

$ A database (manual or electronic) that organizes and accumulates the information, and

$ A reporting mechanism that periodically -- and in a timely fashion -- presents the data to project case managers, and other decision-makers.

In consultation with the evaluator, project personnel should determine the variables for which data will be collected as well as the desired reporting cycle. The evaluator should have primary responsibility for identifying and/or designing the appropriate data collection instruments, the data collection procedures, and the process for transforming raw data into comprehensible tables. Design of the reporting tables or formats should be determined through a collaborative process. Table design should not be left solely to the evaluator. Project personnel have to be able to readily interpret and use the data. Project staff must be able to understand how the tables were constructed as well as the implications of the data. If they are not involved in the design, it is likely they will have difficulty in interpreting and using the data.

In designing the table, simplicity and clarity should be kept in mind. The table title or header should state precisely what data are being presented. The use of jargon and acronyms should be avoided. Column headers should be short, clear, and pithy. If lengthy explanations are needed, they should be placed in footnotes at the bottom of the table. A description of the method that was used to construct the table should be placed below the table. It is particularly important that issues of duplicate counts be clarified. For example, tables that present data on service usage need to specify the number of participants that produced the demand. There is a considerable difference between 100 participants and 20 participants accounting for 80 service contact hours. In the former case, the average number of contact hours per participant is 48 minutes, while in the latter case it is 4 hours. These reflect significantly different levels of intensity or levels of treatment. Finally, the use of elaborate graphics should be avoided. Graphics can hide as much as they reveal.

An outcome evaluation is likely to call for the use of more advanced statistical techniques than counts and percentages. It will be the task of the evaluator to carry out the analysis and generate the statistical output. This does not mean that the resulting tables and interpretations of the statistics need be complicated.

H.   Potential Problems in Data Analysis

Three problems are likely to arise in the process. The first concerns the problem of trivial or non-significant findings. The second relates to issues of translation. The third centers on presentation.

Findings:

There is always a likelihood that a project may not produce the anticipated significant changes in its participants. In fact, it is highly likely that a significant project-driven change will not be

demonstrated. It is *as important* to report negative findings as positive findings. First, while a single negative finding may not be conclusive, an accumulation of negative findings suggests that a particular activity, treatment, or approach does not produce the desired effect. Second, reporting negative findings from a well-conducted demonstration project helps others to modify the approach to see if adjustments produce the expected outcome. Third, while the negative finding may apply to the experimental group as a whole, distinctive subgroups may have reacted positively. Finally, powerful ancillary lessons may have been learned that can be of assistance to other projects in establishing and managing social service delivery systems in the field of self-sufficiency. For example, the project may develop and implement a new case management technique that reduces cost while holding contact hours constant. If you allow yourself to be stopped by the discovery that an intervention either had no effect or only a weak effect, you may neglect to explore ancillary findings.

Translation:

Obviously positive findings should receive wide distribution. However, with either positive or negative findings, important problems of translation can occur. It is not enough to be able to produce statistics that say the project has had an effect. It is also critical to be able to explain the logic and consequences of the effect. Statistics need to be translated into policy implications. Findings must be made clear to lay persons, who are not trained in evaluation methodologies and may be suspicious of statistics. Be careful not to underestimate the difficulty of the translation task.

As a first step in the translation process, the project director or project manager should read and assess the outcome evaluation report. Is it clear? Is it logical? Is it understandable? Are the findings well documented? Are significant findings counter-intuitive, and if so, are they well supported by the data? Are the research methodologies and statistical procedures clearly explained? Are the data tables easy to understand? During this initial review process, the evaluator should be readily available for discussion. After the project director or project manager and possibly other senior project staff have read the report, consideration should be given for review by a wider audience.

A first audience should be the project line staff. If the evaluator cannot make them understand what has occurred, then it is unlikely that lay outsiders will understand the implications of the findings. If possible, the project director should arrange a group meeting to go over the findings with the evaluator. Project staff should have had an opportunity to read the draft evaluation report in preparation for the meeting. The meeting agenda should be well structured and offer opportunity for lively discussion among participants. All comments, negative and positive, are useful data for reviewing the draft report.

A second audience should be other evaluation specialists. The underlying methodology must be able to withstand professional scrutiny. The statistical techniques used should be deemed appropriate to the data. If controversial techniques are used, they should be well buttressed by other approaches. Technical readers should be well versed in both the methodologies of evaluation research and the content of the field. They will be able to tell whether the study can stand up to deep scrutiny.

A third set of reviewers should be policy-makers or their staff. Distribution to a few laypersons with strong writing skills and a policy interest is useful. They can tell whether the policy implications make sense and whether the logic of the analysis is clear.

Presentation:

A final issue is the preparation of statistical tables. Not all evaluators are skilled in the construction and presentation of data tables. In preparing statistical tables for presentation, it is important to keep your audience in mind. It is fair to assume that statisticians and evaluators are able to grasp fairly sophisticated statistical tables. However, do not presume the same about policy-makers or other Community Action Agency personnel. Their professions do not necessarily demand a knowledge of statistics. Terms such as chi square, t-tests, and z-scores may not mean very much to them. Percentages are preferable to decimals. Table footnotes should be used liberally. A practical guide for readability is your own understanding of the report. If you don't understand it, others are not likely to either.

When reporting the results of a significance test, the technique used to derive it and the acceptance level that you applied should be reported as well. The matter of statistical significance should be discussed with your evaluator. Under some circumstances, p-values of 0.10 are acceptable. While you may be inclined to leave the final decisions up to the evaluator, be sure that all decisions are well documented and defended. This should also be true of the assumptions that underlie various analytical techniques. For example, t-tests and ANOVA designs assume that any changes are due to the experimental treatment or intervention. The techniques can only be used without reservation if good experimental control was achieved throughout the life of the project. Control of that kind is difficult to attain in the behavioral sciences.

Finally, keep in mind that evaluation research is fun. It may be challenging and intense, but there is nothing more exciting than discovering that the project you undertook has made a difference. The methodological issues discussed in this section are complex, but important to remain aware of when planning an evaluation. The complexity of these issues underlines the importance of selecting an experienced, reputable evaluator with the communication skills necessary to explain statistical concepts in lay terms.

VII. The Ongoing Evaluation Process and Interim Evaluation Report_____

A. **What Steps in the Evaluation Process Occur During the First Year of Project Operations?**

1.   Finalizing the Evaluation Plan

As described in Chapter V, in most cases there will be an opportunity to more fully develop or revise the original evaluation or data collection plan shortly after the grant is awarded.[2] Once approved, this plan becomes the official evaluation blueprint to be followed. However, as a project begins operating and data are collected, it may make sense to modify all or part of the original evaluation plan. It is important to remember that these plans should be somewhat fluid and adaptable. If the project manager and the evaluator experience any unforeseen data collection problems, it may be particularly important to revise the final evaluation plan.

Any major modifications to the evaluation or data collection plan must be submitted to OCS or other grant agency for review and approval.

2.   Documenting Project Implementation

The start-up of a project is an exciting time. Recruiting and hiring staff, setting up a project office and/or space, holding meetings with other CAA or CBO staff and partnership agencies, developing brochures about the project or planning a kickoff meeting are typically part of the start-up process. Usually, staff members are enthusiastic, and if something doesn't quite work as planned, there are opportunities to quickly shift gears and try alternative approaches.

Within the context of the demonstration projects and any required evaluation, however, all aspects of project implementation are important to document and analyze. Therefore, all modifications to the project may be critical information for the evaluation. To illustrate, if a project plans to offer case management services and assumes a staff/participant ratio of 1:20, a specified number of case managers will need to be hired. If there are difficulties recruiting, and later retaining, staff for these positions, this will have an impact on what services are actually offered. The project director or project manager may decide it would be easier to hire case management assistants at a paraprofessional level. From a project standpoint, this alternative approach to staffing the project is fine. From an evaluation perspective, this change may alter the hypothesis that is being tested or the study questions, which, in turn, may greatly affect analysis and conclusions. Therefore, it is important that these kinds of issues be considered when conducting the *formative and process evaluations*.

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[2] The Demonstration Partnership Program, the Family Support Center, and the REACH grants all call for an evaluation plan. The AFIA grant program only calls for a data collection effort.

Depending upon the evaluation plan and method of collecting data, changes in the project design may be tracked in one of several ways. The evaluator may rely on observation of meetings where staff give a report on project progress, or he or she may review minutes from meetings. Other methods such as interviewing staff may also be used. What is most important, however, is development of a simple yet effective system for noting project changes as they occur. Some project staff have found that a project journal, diary, or log is effective; others find it more useful to do narrative chronological files on their computers. Another approach is to use a time line or implementation matrix, which includes, for example, descriptions of activities and dates for implementing project components and contains notes on deviations from what was originally planned. It is also important to discuss these changes with the evaluator on a regular basis. An early discussion with the evaluator about project changes will allow everyone to make adjustments to the evaluation and still realize a strong design that captures useful data.

An excellent example of how operational issues generate changes in the nature of a program design is a number of the Assets for Independence Act grantees. In their original design, they assumed that they would be able to recruit participants and have them open IDA accounts fairly rapidly. As a consequence of finding that many of the potential IDA accounts holders have significantly greater credit problems than anticipated, they have had to delay the opening of an IDA account in order to effectuate credit repair. The programs also have had to place greater emphasis on credit repair and possibly devote more resources to the issue.

3.   Monitoring Project Implementation

While project monitoring occurs in an evaluation, good projects also monitor their activities even if an evaluation is not underway. Monitoring occurs periodically and is used to check project progress. Initially, monitoring activities will examine whether or not certain project elements are implemented and whether they are implemented as planned. As the project matures, monitoring will serve as a progress check and confirm whether the project remains on track.

The project director, a designated staff member, or a member of the evaluation team may perform the monitoring function. Keep in mind, however, that it should be performed on a regular basis by the <u>same individual</u>.

4.   Developing Policies and Procedures Manual

On many of its demonstration grants, OCS requires that a policies and procedures manual be developed for the project. The manual should include a description of how a participant progresses through the project; copies of the forms used to document participant progress and for other data collection; participant selection criteria; staff job descriptions; protocols that are followed; and other information that directly relates to how the project operates. A good rule of thumb to keep in mind is that the policies and procedures manual should allow someone unfamiliar with the project to review the manual, and, based on the information in the manual, be able to implement and run the project. In other words, the manual should include all the information required to *replicate* the project elsewhere.

5.   Collecting Outcome Data

As was pointed out in most demonstration projects, project staff play an important role in collecting outcome evaluation data. It is usually project staff who complete the data collection forms and then send those forms to a data manager or the project evaluator for entry into the outcome evaluation database.

Typically, one of the first data collection activities is pilot testing the data collection methods. Even though the data collected during pilot testing are usually not included in the final analysis of project effects, these data are crucial for ensuring that the procedures and instruments will produce the information necessary to determine the effectiveness of the project. Pilot testing also offers the opportunity to train project staff in the use of the data collection forms. For these reasons, it is helpful to involve as many staff as possible in the pilot testing activities. The evaluator should debrief staff on any problems encountered while using the data collection procedures and forms.

Actual data collection for the outcome evaluation usually begins once the grant project is fully underway. It is critical that all data collection activities follow the agreed-upon data collection plan. Should project staff find it difficult to follow this plan, it is important to discuss any problems with the evaluator. *Data collection issues need to be resolved as early as possible* to guarantee the reliability and validity of the outcome data. It is recommended that one person on the staff be assigned the responsibility of assembling all data collection forms and transmitting those forms to the evaluator. Having one person routinely carrying out these activities helps to ensure that all data will reach the evaluator for entry into the database.

Often it is the evaluator's responsibility to develop and maintain the outcome evaluation database. However, the grantee sometimes agrees or is required to carry out this function. In such cases, it is recommended that one staff person be assigned to be the database manager and conduct data entry. The likelihood of data entry errors dramatically increases when more than one individual is assigned the responsibility or duty to enter data into the database. Also, clear data entry procedures should be developed and tested by the database manager. Here, the pilot test data can be used to test these data entry procedures.

There are some very important "do's" and "don'ts" surrounding the development of the use of database systems for the purposes of evaluating a project. Prior to either selecting or creating a database system, it is crucial to determine what data elements are to be used. While most modern database or statistical analysis software make it fairly easy to modify files and to add data fields, it is difficult for the evaluator to incorporate more than a few data elements into the analysis on the fly. In addition, if the original database design is fairly complicated, adding fields to the database may be difficult. In general, it is better to start with more fields than are needed. It is easier to cut fields than to add them.

When selecting software to develop or maintain the database in, it is very important to select software that is easy to use, well supported by the manufacturer, and which is familiar to the staff. It is especially important to know whether the hardware that exists in the agency can support the software. For example, Microsoft's ACCESS (a database manager), and SPSS and

SAS (statistical analysis software) have minimum hardware configuration requirements. More recent versions of these software packages won't even run on older hardware.

6.   Resolving Data Collection Problems

Data collection problems arise even in the best of projects and evaluations. Through close monitoring and an open, honest relationship between project staff and the evaluator(s), you can resolve most problems to everyone's satisfaction and still provide the kind of information needed for a meaningful evaluation.

For example, many projects have initially envisioned that data would be recorded on and subsequently abstracted from forms designed specifically for the evaluation. This approach is particularly problematic when forms are collected from partnership agencies, such as JTPA or the State IV-A agency. Some projects have found they were unable to "compare" their project participants to other, similar populations because promised data were not available.

The key to resolving data collection problems is to work from the original matrix of study questions. In other words, review what it is you want to know about your project and determine if there is an alternative method of collecting data that will answer your questions. For example, if you planned to review the frequency with which project participants were referred to certain key partner projects, several methods of collecting data could be used. If you had originally planned to collect data through monthly progress forms submitted by each key partner and later found this option difficult to implement, you could obtain similar information through several alternative methods including a record review of participant files to check for notations of referrals, interviews with staff about referral patterns, or interviews with project participants or referral agencies. Working closely with the evaluator, you should be able to determine the best strategy for the evaluation that will provide needed information without imposing an undue burden on any individual(s) or organization to collect the data.

B.   **How Do These Steps Relate to the Interim Evaluation Report?**

For many demonstration grants, OCS requires an interim evaluation report and a copy of the written policies and procedures manual that results from the process evaluation.

1.   Monitoring/Data Collection and the Interim Report

Analysis can be completed on project implementation (qualitative) data and participant demographics in time to be included in the interim report. Significant elements of the *process evaluation* data are collected during the first project year. The process evaluation will encompass the project implementation phase. Information collected through the monitoring process and other data items will be included. Project changes and refinements, staff recruitment, any unforeseen delays, and other issues will be discussed. Generally, the report will include *narrative descriptions* about the project. In some instances, tables will be necessary. For example, it may be useful to present the participant intake process, by month, in tabular format

depending on the project's approach to participant selection and enrollment. Other project information may also lend itself to presentation in a tabular format.

After the first year of operation, participant demographics should be readily available and presented in the interim report. For some populations, it may be necessary to examine the demographic information collected on the target group being served and compare it to characteristics that were expected. Any variances between the two should be discussed. The implications these variances may have for the overall project design should also be considered. Depending on the group targeted, participant characteristics may be very important. For example, the initial group of DPP projects serving minority males found that the population they served in their projects had different characteristics from those originally assumed. This had an impact on the range of services that were actually provided as compared to the originally planned services.

The interim evaluation should also incorporate a discussion about the data collection instruments and how they are working and report on any modifications that were made to the data collection plan. If preliminary outcome evaluation findings are available, these may also be reported.

2.   Policies and Procedures Manual

OCS and other granting agencies frequently require that the policies and procedures manual be submitted with the interim evaluation report. This document will supplement the evaluation information submitted, not replace it. However, the manual only describes the policies and implementation procedures of the project at the point that it was written; it does not indicate how it changed or evolved. These issues should be addressed in the interim evaluation report.

3.   Data Collection Problems Resolution

Data collection problems, and their resolution, should be described in a separate section of the interim evaluation report. This section should identify and discuss the problems encountered during the first year, addressing each issue according to the following points:

$ Was the data collection problem resolved, and if so, how?

$ Are there still outstanding, unresolved data collection issues?

$ What are the options and alternatives?

$ What is the impact of data collection problems and their resolution on the evaluation design?

It is important to know that major data collection changes need to be cleared through OCS before official changes are made. OCS requires notification because changes sometimes modify the approved evaluation plan, which in turn modifies the grant terms.

C.   What Is Required in the Interim Evaluation Report and When Is It Due?

A suggested table of contents for the interim evaluation report follows:

Suggested Interim Evaluation Outline

I. **Overview of Project**: This section should contain a brief description of the project and the following subsections..

    A.   Purpose of the Demonstration
    B.   Target Population
    C.   Project Structure and Services
    D.   Expected Project Outcomes

II. **Characteristics of Project Participants**: This section should include all necessary demographic data (descriptive) about the participants that were collected throughout the first 6 or 12 months of the project.

    A.   Project Participants
    B.   Comparison Between Project Participants and Target Population

III. **Description of Project Start-Up and Implementation**: At a minimum, this section should include information on partnerships and other community linkages, project staff, participant recruitment, interventions, and organizational (CAA) issues.

    A.   Project elements implemented and discussion of time frame for implementation
    B.   Elements not implemented or changed, with a discussion as to why, how, and when changes were made
    C.   Facilitators of and barriers to project implementation

IV. **Data Collection Issues**: This section should include information on data collection as it relates to project evaluation.

    A.   Current data collection process
    B.   Presentation and discussion of any revisions to the data collection plan since the final evaluation plan was submitted
    C.   Results of any instrument pretests, database development, etc.
    D.   Revised instruments (data collection forms)

Attachment - Policies and Procedures Manual

VIII. <u>Final Reporting Requirements</u>

All OCS demonstration grants require a final report. In some cases, they also require an evaluation report. Below we present an annotated outline of an evaluation report that meets OCS requirements.

<u>ANNOTATED FINAL EVALUATION REPORT OUTLINE</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   **Background:**   The Background section should reflect the issues that gave rise to the project. It should describe the general social, economic, and institutional environment within which the project was implemented, and the general issues that the project was intended to address. For example, Family Support Center grantees will find this to be an excellent place to make the distinction between *homeless prevention* and *homeless intervention* or *triage* projects.   REACH projects can use this section to discuss deregulation and the issues that it creates for low-income individuals.   Assets for Independence Act projects can review the problems associated with a lack of assets and the disadvantage at which it places individuals and families trying to obtain a better quality of life. In addition, this section should enumerate the *assumptions* that gave rise to the intervention. For example, it is more effective to prevent homelessness than pull an individual or family out of it. It is possible to train individuals to use energy more efficiently and reduce energy costs through conservation. Low-income individuals can be shown how to save effectively and create an asset base.

2.   **Needs Assessment:**   This section should contain a clear summary of the *needs assessment* activities that were carried out and the relevance of the findings to the development of the project and the evaluation. If no formal needs assessment was carried out, reasons for initiating the project should be clearly stated. For example, had there been a significant increase in the rate of evictions over the period of time leading up to the implementation of the project, or were the eviction rates above a threshold level which was regarded as unacceptable? What evidence was collected to document these observations or assumptions? What evidence was gathered that demonstrated a need for the proposed intervention? For example, how did the agency know that the primary problem among those who were being evicted was a lack of financial management skills, a lack of marketable job skills, substance abuse, intra-family violence, or some combination of these issues? In other words, what information was gathered and used to guide the design and implementation of the project, and how accurate was it?

3.   **Statement of the Problem(s):** This section should contain a clear statement of the *specific problems* that the ***project was designed to address***. For example, a project designed to prevent evictions for non-payment of rent in a multi-unit, public housing complex may differ significantly from a project that targets Section 8 participants who

live in single family units and are facing eviction for failure to maintain the property. In the former case, the problems may include lack of financial management skills and immediate resource availabilities. In the latter case, the problem may be a lack of non-financial household management skills. The problems delineated in this section should differ from the general issues that may be raised in the background section above. Please note that project problems are different from evaluation problems. Evaluation problems are concerned with issues of knowing that the project had an impact and the evidence necessary to support impact findings. How do you know that the project has achieved the desired results? What evidence needs to be gathered? How can the evidence be gathered?

II.   PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.   **Project Goals and Objectives:** This section should delineate the specific *goals and objectives of the project, not the evaluation*. These goals and objectives should be logically linked to the statement of the problem discussed above. The objectives should be stated in measurable terms. For example, if a project objective was to reduce the number of evictions at a specific site or within a target population, then you might note that the project proposed to reduce the average number of annual evictions at a specific housing complex from 20 to 5. Or that the rate of evictions among those who received an eviction notice was to go down from 75 percent to 35 percent among those who entered the project compared to those who did not. The goals and objectives described in this section should be consistent with those presented in the project logic model.

2.   **Target Population:** This section should contain a clear and precise description of the *target populations* that were to be affected by the project interventions. The section also should specify the number of individuals that were intended to be reached by each intervention. The maximum income level of participants who apply for assistance to OCS funded demonstration projects can vary considerably. As a consequence, maximum income should be an important element in the definition of the target population. If the project targets TANF recipients, then this should be made clear. A description of how these populations were identified should be included.

3.   **The Intervention:** This section should contain a clear description of the intervention, including the "dosage," e.g. duration, frequency, contact time, and intensity level associated with each of the interventions. It is often useful to develop a table that identifies each intervention. To the extent possible, the section should describe the flow or logic of the intervention. The project ***logic model*** should be presented here. The logic model will differ from the section on project goals and objectives in that it also presents the assumptions and activities that formed the foundation of the project, and logically links the assumptions and activities to the project goals, objectives, and outcomes.

4. **Expectations for Change:** It is important to identify the desired changes that provided the rationale for the interventions. For example, was the intervention expected to increase pre-employment skills, train individuals in entrepreneurial activities, divert the individual onto an education track, assist the individual to maintain employment, or initiate community economic development? Was there any expectation of change in work-related and life behaviors? Did the project target and measure motivations, barriers, and skills that might influence the desired behavioral, circumstantial, or institutional changes? Was the project designed to prevent evictions through more frequent and timely payment of rent, better physical maintenance of the rental property, or a combination of these two factors?

The material presented in this section may usefully be summarized in a matrix (See Table 1). Keep in mind that the expectations section calls for a description of how the project originally was expected to work, not how it actually worked. The next section of the report calls for a description of how the project actually was implemented.

Table 1: Original Project Design Matrix

Intervention	Target Population	Expected Numbers	Expected Duration	Expected Intensity	Expected Change or Outcome
Financial Management Training	Head of Household/Family Bill Payer	30 Individuals per Training Cycle	60 Days	One 2 Hour Class per Week for Eight Weeks (16 Classroom Hours). Two Individual Counseling Sessions. Minimum of One Hour Each.	Successfully Maintain Financial Ledger and/or Check Book. Pay Bills Regularly.
Family Therapy	Project Families	14 Families	One Year	Two Hours Every Two Weeks	Reduce Intra-Family Conflict and Stress.
Job Search Skills	Eligible Adults from Project Families	45 Individuals per Training Cycle	45 Days	Two One-Hour Classes per Week for Six Weeks. Two Resume Labs of Three Hours Each. Two Interview Practice Labs of Two Hours Each.	Resume, Enhanced Interview Skills, Increased Number of Job Interviews, Job Offer.
Tutoring	Eligible School Age Children	30 to 40 Children	Variable: One Time to School Year	Need Based. One to Two Hours a Week. Individual or Group Session.	Improved Academic Performance.

III.   PROCESS EVALUATION

1.   **Process Evaluation Questions.** This section should contain the *process evaluation questions*. They should be stated in measurable terms. Process evaluation questions focus attention on the implementation of the project and the services expected to be provided to the participant population. Evaluation questions about process ask whether the expected activities were implemented and carried out at the planned level of intensity; and if not, why they were not. For example, a project objective might be to hold 10 meetings of an advisory group before the first 6 months of the project are up. A related objective might be to achieve an 80% attendance rate by each participating member at the meetings. The two related evaluation questions would be: (1) Did the project hold 10 meetings of the advisory group within 6 months of the startup of the project? (2) Did each of the advisory group members attend at least 8 of the meetings?

In developing evaluation questions, it is critical to focus on the project's core expectations. The project goals and objectives and the logic model will be an effective guide for developing these questions. Project goals and objectives should identify expected outcomes: immediate, intermediate, and final. The logic model indicates whether the project is implementing an activity that might be expected to produce the desired outcomes. If a desired objective was not supported by an activity, it should not be included as a core element of the evaluation. If no activity or intervention supports an outcome, it becomes very difficult to determine what caused the changes. For example, if no training in personal financial management is provided, and yet a significant number of individuals improve their financial management skills, it is difficult to determine what the source of change was. It could be a halo effect of the project, or it could be the result of the individuals taking a course at the local community college. With no intervention supporting an outcome, the likelihood of replicating the outcome elsewhere or with another population will be very low. By carefully examining project goals and objectives and the logic model, the processes and outcomes that are amenable to strong conclusions and that should be assessed can be identified more precisely.

2.   **Additional Evaluation Questions to Consider.** The previous section discussed implementation of the core intervention and ways to develop and answer a set of process evaluation questions that indicate the fidelity with which the intervention was implemented, that is, the extent to which the project was faithful to its original design and purpose. The general approach that was used to gather evidence to answer the questions should also be laid out. Those factors that conditioned or influenced the ability of the project to implement the core intervention, but were not directly linked to it, should be described. Particular attention should be paid to mapping out how the organizational interactions and characteristics of the project affected the success or failure of the participants. Specifically, questions should be developed that probe:

Ÿ   Partnership relationships and interactions;

Ÿ   Staffing patterns, skills, and interactions;

Ÿ   Project policies and procedures;

Ÿ   Participant outreach and contact methods;

Ÿ   Service provision, kinds, and extent by project partners and collaborating agencies;

Ÿ   Processes for direct service provision, indirect service provision, and referrals;

Ÿ   Project/Community linkages;

Ÿ   Changes from the original plan; and,

Ÿ   The flow of external community resources, real and in-kind, into the project.

You can probably think of other project elements and issues that might have influenced project and participant outcomes. It is often useful to summarize your findings in a table. Table 2 represents a data collection and reporting matrix that can be useful for carrying out a post-hoc evaluation and presenting the results. It is designed to capture information on project implementation and project changes that might have occurred during implementation. If filled out in detail, it supports the development of a "thick" description of the implementation process in the final report. The "objective" column can easily be re-titled as an activity column with no loss in information as long as objectives are stated in measurable terms somewhere in the evaluation plan and linked to specific activities.

3.   **Data Collection Instruments:** In this section, the data collection instruments that were acquired or constructed for the process evaluation should be described. Whenever possible, any instruction materials for using the instruments should be included as an appendix.

4.   **Data Collection Procedures:** This section should identify and describe the procedures used to physically collect the data. Each data collection event should be described and the schedule for completion laid out. The procedures used for recruiting and training data collectors (where appropriate) should be described. Data entry and management procedures should be fully articulated and coding and data entry quality control procedures should be described.

5.   **Analytical Procedures and Results:** This section should describe the data analysis procedures that were used, documentable results, and the reasons why supporting evidence should be regarded as reliable. Any statistical procedures should be fully described. The strengths and weaknesses of the various analytical and statistical procedures should be articulated. The results of the analysis of the project implementation should be carefully and fully laid out in this section. Both the barriers to and facilitators of project success should be presented.

TABLE 2: Documenting Effective Project Implementation Practices

OBJECTIVE	INITIAL STRATEGIES	PROBLEM (YES/NO)	REASON	REVISED STRATEGIES *	IMPROVEMENT (YES/NO)	EVIDENCE
Recruiting Participants	Brochure passed out at community center	Yes	Community center participants non-English speaking/low literacy	Rewrite brochure to 6th grade level and translate	YES	Project applications went from 3 to 25 on average per brochure drop.
Retaining Participants						
Staffing Arrangements						
Collaborative Relationships						
Hiring Practices						

Service 1: Case Management					
Service 2: Job Training					
Service 3: GED Classes					
Service 4: ESL Classes					
Sustainability: Project					
Sustainability: Components					

*When you describe a revised strategy, you should indicate at what point in the project the revised strategy was implemented.

IV. OUTCOME EVALUATION

1. **Outcomes:** This section should describe the specific outcomes that were assessed. If the outcomes that were assessed differed from those that were intended to be assessed, the reasons for this change should be documented in this section. For example, if individuals refused to provide income data after they had left the project (or refused to release the information to the evaluators), proxy variables may have been substituted to measure economic well-being, such as employment, payment of back rent, timely payment of rent and utility bills over time, etc. It is useful to articulate the problems associated with measuring and assessing changes using the variables that were included in the final evaluation.

2. **Outcome Evaluation Questions:** This section presents the outcome evaluation questions that you set out to answer. What outcomes were being measured or assessed? As with the process evaluation, the outcomes that were targeted for evaluation should be measurable.

3. **Research Design:** This section should delineate the research design used to assess the effectiveness of the project in producing the desired outcomes or impacts. The design may range from a rigorous experimental design with a randomly assigned control group to a well constructed ethnographic study based on observational data and in-depth interviews with participants and staff. It does not matter. The point is to document tightly all procedures as well as any problems encountered in implementing the design. It is particularly important to describe any evidentiary demands made by the research design and how those demands were met.

4. **Sample Size and Characteristics:** It is important to specify the *size* and *defining characteristics* of the population included in the outcome evaluation and from which the data were drawn. It is particularly important to define the unit of analysis in this section if it has not already been defined in Section II.3: Target Population. Be sure that the target population and the sample population are defined exactly in the same way. It is very important to identify whether the sample consists of individuals, families, or groups, and how these "units" are constructed. For example, things can get very confusing if one part of the report targets families, and another individuals. If the project is designed to improve family functioning, then the evaluation needs to assess family functioning, not individual level functioning. If the targeting strategy and/or project participant selection criteria were changed during the life of the project, this is the place to address the changes and the possible implications of the changes. The sample section also should address attrition and non-response problems and the impact of sample size and attrition on statistical power. Among at-risk populations, attrition is common both within the experimental and the control group and can cause significant difficulties for evaluating the project. For example, it is not unusual for project participants in welfare-to-work projects to move frequently. Individuals who entered the project at the beginning may be very difficult to find 12 to 18 months later. Even if they can be located, it may be difficult to convince them to answer a series of questions about their work or housing

history since they left the project. Finally, individuals who move may differ systematically from those who stay put. Analytical procedures can be compromised (as well as the implementation of the project) if attrition rates are too high or response rates too low. Solutions may include over-sampling of key populations, or the development of strong incentive procedures. If incentives were used to induce individuals to participate in the evaluation, these incentives should be described and their efficacy assessed. We strongly suggest that a matrix be constructed along the lines of the one proposed below (See Table 3). If a sample of individuals was drawn from the participant group, in order to carry out the evaluation, it is very important to describe the sample methodology and the response rate. Finally, if there was a control or comparison group, this section should describe how it was constructed and whether major differences existed between the control group and the treatment group at baseline.

5. **Measurement Instruments or Items:** This section should describe any measurement instruments that were constructed or acquired and used in the evaluation. Whenever possible, it is particularly important to describe any prior research on the validity and reliability of the instruments used. Although most demonstration projects lack the resources to validate their own instruments, if the instrument was constructed specifically for the project, it will be important to identify the methods used to assess its validity and reliability. Include copies of all data collection instruments in the appendix, noting whether they are copyrighted.

6. **Data Collection Procedures:** This section should describe the physical procedures used to collect the data, including face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys, focus group activities, paper-and-pencil tests, observations, archival research, or administrative data reviews. It is important to indicate how data collection personnel were recruited and trained, and how the quality of their coding work was ensured throughout the project. The data entry and data management procedures used should also be detailed. Finally, indicate the number of times data were collected and whether any problems arose in the data collection process.

7. **Analytical and Statistical Procedures:** This section should describe the analytical and statistical procedures used to assess outcomes. Attribution and power problems should be delineated and potential confounding variables should be identified. The strengths, weaknesses, and sensitivities of the techniques used should be clearly defined. If multivariate techniques and order of entry procedures were used, these should be described carefully and integrated with sample size selection.

ble 3: Actual Project Design Matrix

tervention	Target Population	Actual Numbers	Actual Duration	Actual Intensity	Evaluated
nancial anagement aining	Head of Household/Family Bill Payer	23 Out of 45 Eligible	45 Days	One 90 Minute Class per Week for Six Weeks (9 Classroom Hours). One Individual Counseling Session. Minimum of 45 Minutes Each.	12/23
mily Therapy	Project Families	21 Out of 45 Families	One Year	One 50 Minute Session Every Week	11/21
b Search Skills	Eligible Adults from Project Families	31 Out of 65	28 Days	Two 50 Minute Classes per Week for Four Weeks. Two Resume Labs of Two Hours Each. One Interview Practice Lab of 90 Minutes Each.	22/31
toring	Eligible School Age Children	21 Out of 57	Variable: 3 to 14 Times per Semester.	Teacher Recommended. Individual Assessment Not Possible. One to Two Hours a Week. Individual or Group Session.	7/21

TABLE 4: Documenting Effective Practices for Attaining Participant Outcomes

SERVICE	OBJECTIVES	PRE-SERVICE ASSESSMENT	POST-SERVICE ASSESSMENT	PROBLEMS (EXPLANATIONS FOR INEFFECTIVENESS)	SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEM *
Job Training	Attainment of certification as child care provider.	100% of participants had no marketable skills.	62% of initial participants became licensed childcare providers.	95% of participants that did not attain objective did not have sufficient proficiency in English. 5% dropped out.	Provide ESL classes to those participants with low proficiency in English.
Employability Training					
Parenting Classes					
GED Classes					
ESL Classes					

Case Management				
Tutoring for Children				
Early Childhood Development Services				
Life Skills Training				

*Solutions to problem may involve providing new services that you would then document as effective or not effective.

V. APPENDICES:

1. **Data Collection Instruments:** It is useful to include copies of all data collection instruments where appropriate. This may be particularly important when developing new, untested instruments or data collection procedures. Be sure to note whether they are copyrighted.

2. **Technical Memoranda:** These may include memoranda on sampling procedures, analytical procedures, or specialized instruments.

3. **Data Collection Manuals:** These should include all manuals used by data collection personnel in the field. Data collection training manuals should also be included.

4. **Bibliography:** A bibliography should be included if the body of the text referred to published or unpublished articles, monographs, books, or other materials.